GUITAR WORLD

SPECIAL ISSUE
50 YEARS
AEROSMITH

GUITAR & BASS
TRANSCRIPTIONS
AEROSMITH
TOYS IN THE ATTIC
STARCRAWLER
I LOVE LA
BON JOVI
LIVIN' ON A PRAYER

+

K.K. DOWNING
THE MARS VOLTA
ROBBIE ROBERTSON

AEROSMITH

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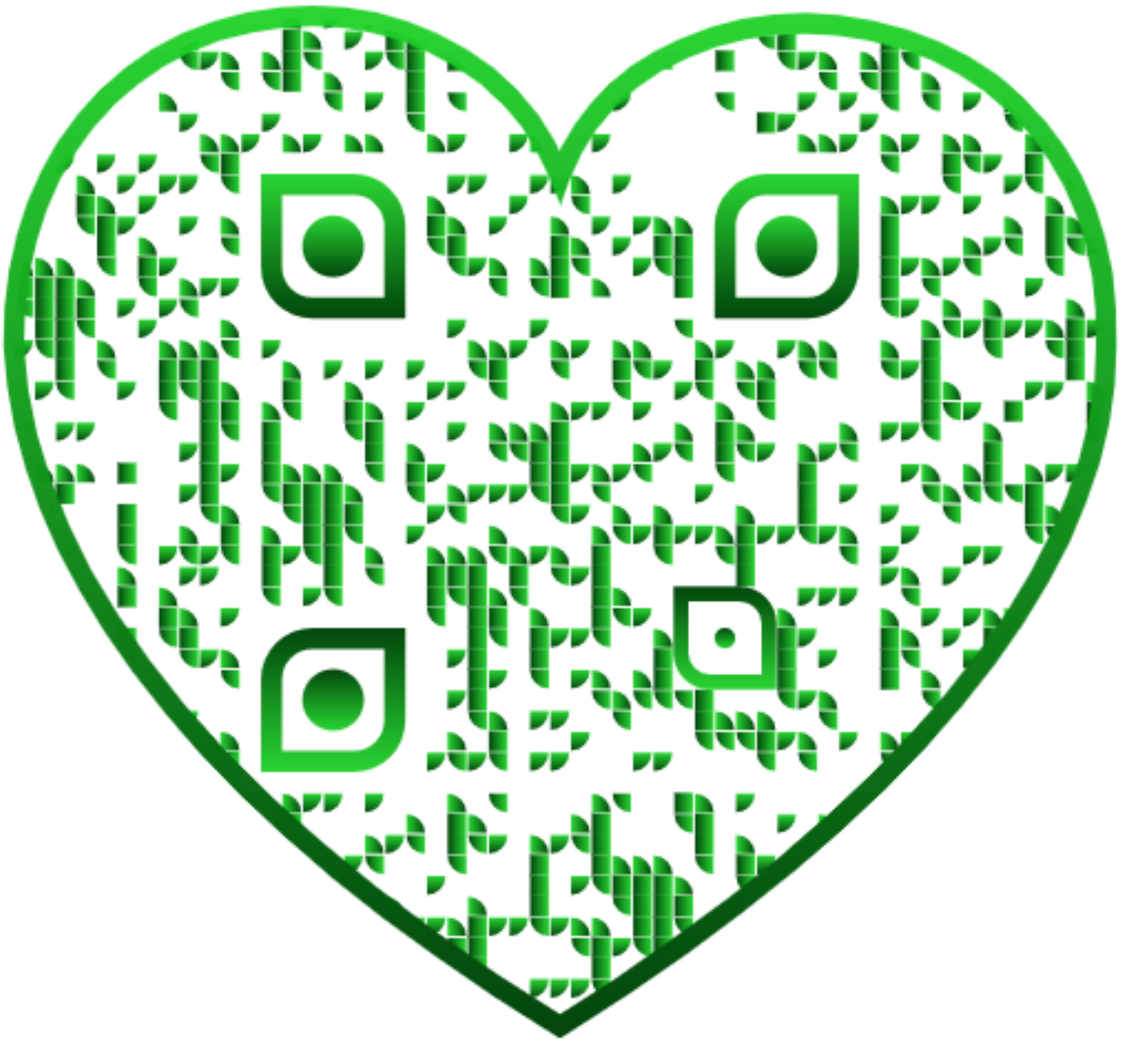

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"There's a cool Japanese import of Rocks *that's just the guitar tracks. I listened back to it, and I had to put a diaper on. I loved it so much. Have you heard it?"*

In exclusive new interviews, Joe Perry and Brad Whitford (who's quoted above) walk us through more than 50 years of Aerosmith history. We also check in with Darren Hurst — aka Joe Perry's guitar tech — and we hear from a star-studded cast of characters, including Steve Hunter, Brian May, Zakk Wylde, Steve Lukather, Paul Gilbert, Nikki Sixx, Wolfgang Van Halen, Vinnie Vincent, Eddie Martinez and many more

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Joe Perry [*left*] and Brad Whitford in Tokyo, September 19, 1990

KOH HASEBE/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGES

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The **Vox AC30** consistently appears near the top of lists of the greatest guitar amps of all time. The reason is simple: the Vox AC30 has a very distinctive sound that also happens to correspond with what many guitarists consider great tone

COVER PHOTO: NEIL ZLOZOWER/ATLAS ICONS

WOODSHED

VOL. 44 | NO. 12 | DECEMBER 2023

AEROSMITH BY NUMBERS

FIFTY YEARS OF Aerosmith! Of course, if you look at the band timeline that starts on page 54, you'll notice we're actually dealing with 53 years. And if you do the math, you'll notice that our April 1997 cover (shown below) celebrated Aerosmith's 25th anniversary using 1972 as their Ground Zero. So, what's that — 51 years? Let's just say that — for the purposes of this issue, we're celebrating the 50th anniversary of their self-titled debut album, the one that gave us "Dream On."

But does the exact number really matter anyway? The point is, these guys are still here. And — here's a true rock 'n' roll miracle for you — *it's the same five guys*. What other major band from that era can make that claim?

Often I'll think about how a band starts out with five friends or relatives from the same place, people who get together because of a unique set of circumstances, all involving a love of music and — most likely — a thirst for fame, and then go on to make magic. Then, 17 years later, they break up; the singer hires five pro musicians, and the guitarist and bass player do the same thing. I know that's a common practice, but if you ask me, something primal and emotional is lost when it happens. And, outside of about five bumpy years in their relatively early days, this never happened to Aerosmith. That, to me, is what's really worth celebrating here.

A ROBBIE ROBERTSON BONUS: If Alan Paul's Robertson tribute (page 38) leaves you wanting more, check out Robbie's truly bizarre solo on Eric Clapton's "Sign Language." I'll just leave it at that.

CORRECTION: We screwed up one of our recent Defenders of the Faith entries. Although we ran Mike Casey's entry correctly in the September issue, we accidentally used his photo (again) when we ran Marcelo Roascio's entry in the November issue. The correct version of Roascio's Defenders entry appears in this issue.

We profoundly apologize to both guitarists! — ***Damian Fanelli***

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EDITORIAL
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Damian Fanelli
(damian.fanelli@futurenet.com)
SENIOR MUSIC EDITOR Jimmy Brown
TECH EDITOR Paul Riario
ASSOCIATE EDITORS Andy Aledort, Chris Gill
PRODUCTION EDITOR Jem Roberts
MUSIC TRANSCRIPTIONIST AND ENGRAVER Jeff Perrin
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS Gregory Adams, Jim Beaugez, Joe Bonamassa, Joe Bosso, Andrew Daly, Joe Matera, Mark McStea, Alan Paul, Ryan Reed, Amit Sharma, Josh Smith, Andy Timmons, Jon Wiederhorn

ART
SENIOR DESIGN DIRECTOR Mixie von Bormann
ADDITIONAL PAGE DESIGN Damian Fanelli, Eva Garis
IMAGE MANIPULATION MANAGER Gary Stuckey

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DIGITAL EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Michael Astley-Brown
DIGITAL ASSOCIATE EDITOR Jackson Maxwell
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VIDEO
VIDEO EDITOR Alan Chaput

CIRCULATION
HEAD OF NEWSTRADE Tim Mathers

PRODUCTION
HEAD OF PRODUCTION Mark Constance
SENIOR AD PRODUCTION MANAGER Nicole Schilling
DIGITAL EDITIONS CONTROLLER Jackson Hudson
PRODUCTION MANAGER Nola Cokely

ADVERTISING
HEAD OF INDUSTRY: MUSIC Brian Preston
brian.preston@futurenet.com
ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE Robert Dye
732-241-7437, robert.dye@futurenet.com
ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE Jeff Donnenwerth
678-427-1535, jeff.donnenwerth@futurenet.com

CONSUMER MARKETING
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT Sheri Taubes

MANAGEMENT
MANAGING DIRECTOR, MUSIC Stuart Williams
GROUP EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Scott Rowley
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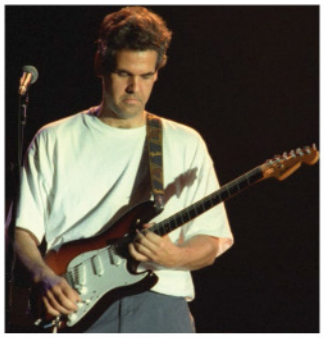


JIM STEINFELDT/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES (BARTER) ADAM FORSTER (HAND)

Thanks for the Steve Bartek feature!

I can't tell you how surprised and excited I was when I came across the Steve Bartek interview in your October 2023 issue. He's been a guitar hero of mine for more than 20 years and I always felt like he deserved more recognition. He has a really unique approach that fit Oingo Boingo so well, but his talent goes far beyond that, as your enlightening interview shows. Thanks for featuring one of my favorite guitarists — it made my day!

— Taylor Roelofs

Tallying votes for Talking Heads and Sonia Anubis

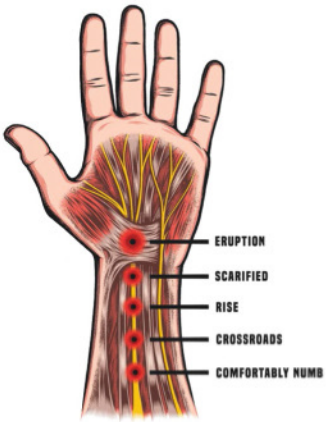
Hello. Longtime reader and subscriber — almost from the beginning. You simply must put Sonia Anubis in the magazine! A full feature is warranted on this young talent [*who's*] keeping the flame alive! Come on! Also, [*it*] would be nice to have some sort of Talking Heads feature; yes, I know the three other members (Tina, Chris and Jerry) don't get along with David, but who cares? It's the music that matters. I think younger readers would be well served with a feature. Cheers!

— Anonymous

Don't be in a hurry to blame shredding!

[*Referring to "Hurts So Good" from October 2023*] It should be noted that this was a very small study, N=25 participants, and that studies like this are often fraught with confounding factors (i.e. other factors that could explain any pain or discomfort). Just because they play guitar and shred does not mean shredding is the root cause of their pain. Correlation does not equal causation. Shred on!

— Dr. Arneh Babakhani

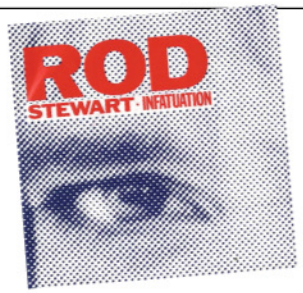


More private lessons with the stars, please

Longtime (since 1994) subscriber from Italy here. Please, can we bring back the original "private lesson" feature? *GW* turns into any other guitar magazine with "in the style of" lessons. Case in point: Instead of asking (for the millionth time) Nuno Bettencourt about his Eddie story, it would have been better to have a "master class lesson" like the immortal "Peace Demonstration" in the December 1992 issue. And while we're at it, [*how about*] a "collector's choice" recap of some sort? Like a page in every issue, or an online gallery?

— Antonio Pizzileo

[It's safe to say that a private lesson with Nuno was our original intention, but sadly, we don't have control over the universe... (not yet, anyway!) — D.F.]



Yes, pop rocked a few more times...

I enjoyed your September 2023 piece on the pairing of rock and pop, but there were some obvious omissions. The most obvious one was Michael Jackson's "Dirty Diana." The song was a Number 1 hit, and the sexy video was in heavy rotation on MTV in 1988. Billy Idol guitarist Steve Stevens unleashed the fury with a blazing solo that also included ray-gun effects! Stevens also played aerobatic guitar on Harold Faltermeyer's "Top Gun Anthem" from the 1986 *Top Gun* soundtrack. It won a Grammy for Best Pop Instrumental Performance in 1987. Kenny Loggins' "Danger Zone" was a Number 2 hit from the *Top Gun* soundtrack and included a soaring solo by Dann Huff.

Rod Stewart scored a Number 6 hit in 1984 with "Infatuation," which featured Jeff Beck. Beck's guitar lines and tone played a major role in the song's success. The video was popular on MTV and Beck can be seen playing the melodic and powerful solo. Also worth noting is Beck's excellent slide work on Jon Bon Jovi's "Blaze of Glory" from 1990.

In 1986, session guitarist Eddie Martinez supplied sexy guitar licks on Robert Palmer's "Addicted to Love."

Rick Springfield's "Jessie's Girl" and the Tubes' "She's a Beauty" are still popular today. Neil Giraldo laid down a catchy solo and provided bass for "Jessie's Girl." "She's a Beauty" featured killer guitar work from Steve Lukather.

Don Henley's "Dirty Laundry" contained scorching leads by Lukather and Joe Walsh.

Frida's "I Know There's Something Going On" from 1983 is a personal favorite. Multi-talented musician Daryl Stuermer supplied a trippy guitar solo while Phil Collins produced and added drums.

— Trace Rock

Arts and sciences can thrive together

Thank you for publishing the excellent interview with Sophie Loyd [*September 2023*]. Sophie is highly talented and her story is remarkable. I was particularly struck by two comments in the interview: She turned down a scholarship to study forensic science and she approached guitar systematically and "quite logically." These comments resonated with me because Sophie's story is more evidence that the sciences and the arts can not only coexist, they can thrive off one another. Too often, I feel, we live in a world where the perception is that people must be either scientific or artistic. The reality is that people can be both. Arts and sciences can inform, enhance and inspire each other. Thank you to Sophie for sharing this part of her story. I hope it encourages everyone to explore both the artistic and scientific aspects of their personality. Aloha,

— David Carter

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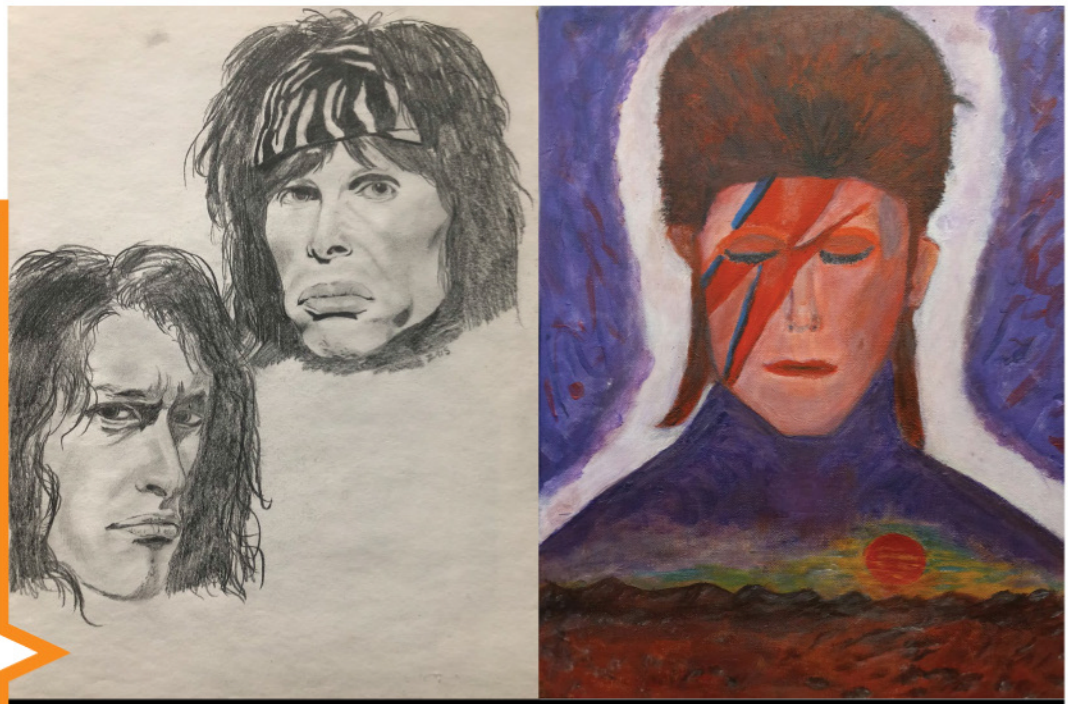
READER ART

OF THE MONTH

If you've created a drawing, painting or sketch of your favorite guitarist and would like to see it in an upcoming issue of *Guitar World*, email **GWSoundingBoard@futurenet.com** with a screenshot or .jpg of the image!



JOE PERRY & STEVEN TYLER BY DAVID ZAIS

DAVID BOWIE BY STEVEN P. RASK

DEFENDERS *of the Faith*

Marcelo Roascio

AGE: 54
HOMETOWN: Buenos Aires, Argentina
GUITARS: Ernie Ball Music Man Luke III, Sterling by Music Man LK100, DOH Series, Fernandes Ravelle Deluxe, Ibanez R335GF, Fender Jeff Beck Strat
SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Originals for my instrumental trio (Roascio RCM), plus Deep Purple "Black Night," Gary Moore "The Loner" and Whitesnake "Fool for Your Loving"
GEAR I WANT MOST: Valeton GP-200, Orange Super Crush 100, Godin Fairmount CH

Scott J. Ham

GUITARS: PRS Angelus, Ovation Celebrity and ESP LTD H-100
SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Fates Warning "Ivory Gate of Dreams 1. Innocence," Rush "A Farewell to Kings," DMB "Grey Street"
GEAR I MOST WANT: Martin D-28, Ernie Ball Music Man JP6, Mesa Boogie Mark V combo

Richard Dazin

AGE: 59
HOMETOWN: Salon de Provence, France
GUITARS: Martin D-35, Martin 0018, Gibson J25, two Japanese Takamine C100 (six and 12 strings), vintage Paul Brett Signature 12-string, 1983 Fender Strat (U.S., Fiesta Red), Fender Telecaster, 1979 Japanese Fender Strat (Lake Placid Blue), Gibson ES-335... and many more!
SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Originals by my band, Watermill
GEAR I MOST WANT: Martin D-45

Are you a Defender of the Faith? Send a photo, along with your answers to the questions above, to **GWSoundingBoard@futurenet.com**. And pray!

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ARE BACK!
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STYX 19 | 20 MAEBE | SKINDRED 21 | JENNIFER BATTEN 22 | 24 THE HIVES | 27 ANNIE SHRED | KING GIZZARD (ETC., ETC.!) 28 | DANNI STEFANETTI 29

"Springsteen taught me how to write songs, but Pearl Jam and Dinosaur Jr. — that's who taught me how to play those songs that I'd learned to write," Brian Fallon says

PHOTO BY BURAK CINGI/REDFERNS

One for the History Books

THE GASLIGHT ANTHEM'S BRIAN FALLON & CO. BRING THE NOISE ON THEIR FIRST ALBUM SINCE REFORMING

By Jim Beaugez

OVER THE COURSE of Brian Fallon's three-album solo career — all recorded and released while on hiatus from his main gig fronting the Gaslight Anthem — he never played any of his other band's songs with his solo group, despite having sure-fire crowd pleasers like "45" and "The '59 Sound" in his pocket.

"I just felt it was weird to have another band playing your old band's songs," Fallon says from his home in New Jersey, where he's been tinkering with amps ahead of the October 27 release of *History Books*, the first Gaslight Anthem album since 2014's *Get Hurt*.

"I guess it's not weird if you're Noel Gallagher and your band's broken up and you're not getting back together — or Johnny Marr," he says. "But for us, it was less about it being over and more like, we just don't know what the next move is. And it took about eight years to figure that out."

Being off the road for a year and a half following the release of the introspective *Local Honey* in 2020 gave him space to think about what might come next for his solo career. The answer was easy: nothing. "I was like, 'I'm good,'" he says. "I feel like I did what I wanted to do for myself, and I really did not have anything else to add."

While at first he was hesitant to whisper the word "reunion" even to himself, he began writing songs that felt a lot like his old band. "Positive Charge," the first song fans heard from *History Books* this summer, was also the first song he wrote in

BRIAN FALLON RECALLS HOW HIS AMP MODS INSPIRED THE GASLIGHT ANTHEM'S FIRST HIT RECORD

ON NEARLY EVERY Gaslight Anthem album, barring the new *History Books*, where he paired a Fender Jaguar and a Gibson ES-330 with an Orange Custom Shop 50, you can hear the results of guitarist and vocalist Brian Fallon's constant tinkering with amplifiers.

But one album in particular — their 2008 breakthrough release *The '59 Sound*, arguably their most revered album to date — derives so much of its identity from his tweaked-out guitar tone that the amp he modified, a '59 Fender Bassman reissue, is right there in the name of the record.

"I was just trying to get it to sound as good as Bruce Springsteen at the Hammersmith Odeon [*the 1975 live recording*]," he says. "That guitar sound is my favorite thing in the world, and I got it and it sounded incredible. And I remember losing my mind over it." [*Laughs*]

It's hard to imagine driving songs like "Great Expectations," "The Patient Ferris Wheel" and the title cut without the chiming clarity of his Bassman, or even married to the fuzz tones of later work like "Stay Vicious" from 2014's *Get Hurt*.

But 15 years ago, after thumbing through Gerald Weber's 1996 book on tube amps, *A Desktop Reference of Hip Vintage Guitar Amps*, Fallon tore down his Bassman 4x10 to just the tweed-covered wooden cabinet and a bare chassis. Then he rebuilt it by hand, wiring all-new parts including a transformer and choke from Mercury Magnetics, Jupiter capacitors, and a Weber baffle and speakers.

"It's just part of my personality to do that," he says. "I have a real specific idea of what I want, and I change what needs to be changed to get less bass, more bass, less gain, more gain. And that amp is why it's called *The '59 Sound*."

— Jim Beaugez

that initial spurt of creativity. "I was like, maybe I wanna write rock songs again," he says, "and then that came out so quickly and easily, like it was waiting there for me to grab it."

Fallon slow-walked the steps to the band's eventual reset in 2022 from there, first calling on drummer Benny Horowitz, whom he credits as the "unofficial spiritual advisor" of the band. They talked, and then they jammed some of Fallon's new songs. Once they brought in guitarist Alex Rosamilia and bassist Alex Levine, they dove into the back catalog without a plan, calling out songs on the fly to see if they still felt like the Gaslight Anthem.

That reconnection inaugurated the second era of the band, consummated with sold-out shows on both sides of the Atlantic later that year. But none of it would have happened without the spark of "Positive Charge," an archetypal slab of their barn-burning style — "Gaslight Anthem 101," as Fallon says — that connects right out of the gate with tortured licks from the J Mascis school of phrasing and overdrive.

As they prepared to record *History Books*, they reached far beyond their early punk influences, and even beyond the oft-cited inspiration they gleaned from Pearl Jam and Bruce Springsteen (who turns up on the title track). In the process, they focused more than ever on guitar solos, the time-honored rock cliché that even Nirvana and Sonic Youth embraced.

"Everybody knows we came up on Bruce Springsteen, the Clash, all that stuff," Fallon says, "and that's true. But the music that was ours, when we were 11, was Jane's Addiction, Red Hot Chili Peppers, all that stuff. It was very guitar focused. So I said to Alex, 'I want the music to be more focused on guitar solos, and we should both try to do 'em.'"

True to his word, the 10 songs on *History Books* pack more adventurous guitar work than much of the band's previous five albums. Despite their straightforward, punk-influenced heartland rock sound, Fallon and Rosamilia aren't necessarily boxed into off-the-shelf pentatonic runs. On "Autumn," Rosamilia veers into "Come As You Are" territory by manipulating an Electro-Harmonix Small Clone, the same pedal Kurt Cobain used on the Nirvana hit, with producer Peter Katis ratcheting the intensity with more effects on his side of the callback mic.

"Peter comes in with this really hard tremolo, and he's stuttering the guitar part while Alex is making a bend, and the two of 'em are insane together, and I'm loving this," he says. The taste of freedom led to more experimentation in sounds, an about-face from the more conventional guitar sounds of their previous work.

Brian Fallon in action in Berlin, August 9, 2022

The 10 songs on *History Books* pack more adventurous guitar work than much of the band's previous five albums

"We kept the sound pretty traditional, always — clean guitar, tape echo, whatever Bruce Springsteen and Joe Strummer had, that's what I want," he says. "And when we did ['*Autumn*'], we were like, but that's not ours. What's ours? And what was ours was all this noise-rock insanity, 'cause we came from this angular punk."

Those out-there sounds are an even bigger departure for Fallon, whose singer-songwriter solo albums became more mid-tempo and employed more acoustic instruments from 2016's *Painkillers* through *Local Honey*. But with *History Books*, he not only slams the cover down, he practically tosses it onto the pyre.

"Springsteen for sure taught me how to write songs, but Hot Water Music and Pearl Jam and Dinosaur Jr. and Fugazi and Sonic Youth, and even the Beastie Boys, that's who taught me how to play those songs that I'd learned to write," he says.

"We didn't know how to play as well as Jimi Hendrix or even Mike McCready or any of those guys, but we definitely could go [*imitates guitar noise*] with a fuzz pedal, and it was great. That's the first time you felt like you had Thor's hammer and there was electricity running through your guitar and shooting out into this lame town that you lived in. And that's why you get into music — to kick stuff over, you know?"

FRANK HOENSCH/REDFERNS

INQUIRER

JAMES "J.Y." YOUNG

THE STYX LEGEND CHOOSES THE ONE GUITAR HE'D SAVE IF THE BUILDING WERE BURNING DOWN

Q: What was the first song you learned to play?
I had a Beatles songbook, and the first song I mastered from it was "Please Please Me." All you had to do was play the backing chords; there was no solo or anything. Later, when I heard Eric Clapton's "Crossroads" solo, that's when I really started to learn how to play lead guitar.

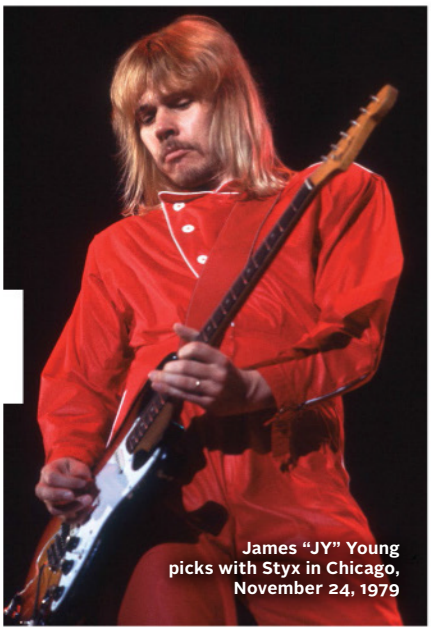
Q: Do you remember your first gig?
It was at some sort of high school dance with a band called the Catalinas. I was around 16. As we were all into automobiles at that point, we decided to call the band that name [*The Pontiac Catalina was produced from 1950 to 1981*]. I think we made $25 from the gig.

Q: Ever had an embarrassing moment on stage?
It happened on several occasions — to me particularly — on one of the smaller stages [*Styx*] used to play on in the early days. I'd wear new boots, but this one time, somebody had spilled water on the stage, and so I fell flat on my face. I quickly stood back up and kept going because the show must go on. After that happened once or twice, I decided to get different shoes and became more careful!

Q: What's your favorite piece of gear?
A device called the Sustainiac, which all my Strats are outfitted with. It allows me to get feedback forever, and it kind of helps the strings continue to vibrate.

Q: Suppose the building is burning down; what one guitar from your collection would you save?
It would be this beautiful custom Strat knockoff that my guitar tech created for me. And again, because I've always been into automotive stuff and drag racing, it's painted metal flake green, which is almost like an automobile finish on the outside. It's got a maple neck and is also fitted with a Sustainiac. So I can stand there, play the guitar and get feedback all day — or until the batteries die!

Q: When was the last time you practiced and what did you play?


James "JY" Young picks with Styx in Chicago, November 24, 1979

I'm a lazy guitarist. When I was a teenager, though, I'd practice eight hours a day until I got my chops up to speed. And then when we got a recording contract, I continued to practice a lot for the first three or four albums. But then ultimately, I realized I was never going to be a great player like Tommy Shaw, so I guess I'm just a power-chord and single-string lead player now. But I'm pretty good at it!

Q: What aspect of the guitar would you like to improve?
I have a lot of trouble with arpeggiated parts when I'm jumping around and doing different things on stage. It's hard to do. So that's something I'd like to improve. I'm also fascinated by electric blues, so that's something I like to work on. I've been privileged to meet Bo Diddley and Buddy Guy; I'm from Chicago, and both of those guys were Chicagoans too so I remained close with them.

Q: What advice would you give to your younger self?
I've been kind of blessed along this highway of life I'm on, so I wouldn't change a thing. You do learn from the bad, and we've had some bad stuff. And when you celebrate the good, you try to duplicate the good stuff as you go forward. So you try and work out why that thing was good and then try and figure out some other way to make it work again. Sometimes [*the good*] could be something as simple as lifting a little thing from another type of music or just listening to another new instrument. Tommy Shaw, for example, breaks out a mandolin every now and then. We had a song called "Boat on the River" that sounds like an Eastern European folk song, and it was a huge hit all over Europe, yet we couldn't get any traction at all in the States or Canada or anywhere else in the world with it. — *Joe Matera*

WHAT'S ON MY PLAYLIST

JOSH WEAVER
OF ROYAL THUNDER

1
"Hollywood Forever Cemetery Sings"
Father John Misty
I love the beauty and simplicity of this song. The slow build with the drums, the raw-sounding guitar, the incredible vocal melodies and the lyrics really capture the imagination. A perfectly orchestrated song.

2
"Down on Freestreet"
The Hellacopters
This band has been one of my favorites since the early 2000s. This is a great example of what they do; it's rock 'n' roll! And while you can hear other influences, it's unmistakably the Hellacopters. Their tones and playing are incredible and have been a reference in my tone hunt for years.

3
"Veil of Pain"
Soft Kill
The use of delays and reverbs is incredible, along with the driving, hypnotic melodic vibe. While there are post-punk/gothic influences for this band and song, it is just a starting point. They've really carved out their own sound over the years, and I love it.

4
"Fountain of Good Fortune"
Rolling Blackouts Coastal Fever
This song really takes you on a journey. Sad and hopeless, with a spark of happiness and an indie vibe. I've always gravitated to darker music, but it's cool when it can be done in a song that is creative and not overtly dark. This song does that in spades.

5
"From the Edge of the Deep Green Sea"
The Cure
There's so much going on here — so much building, emotion, melodies and dynamics. I've never heard anything as creative, dark and beautiful. The tones and playing are incredible, and the feeling captured in the writing is truly a gift.

ROYAL THUNDER'S NEW ALBUM, *REBUILDING THE MOUNTAIN*, IS OUT NOW.

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES (YOUNG) PROVIDED/PR (WEAVER)

Maebe

WHY AN ALBUM CALLED *REBIRTH. RELIVE. REPEAT.* IS ACTUALLY A CALL FOR GUITAR PLAYING TO CHANGE, GROW AND DEVELOP

By Andrew Daly

"Guitar has to go through its rebirth, but it also must channel the past," says Michael Astley-Brown

"MAEBE'S FIRST ALBUM was all about seeing whether I could do this," guitarist Michael Astley-Brown tells *Guitar World*. "I've always struggled with having confidence in my playing, but I wanted to focus on putting together a body of work just to see if I could do it."

It's a surprising revelation, given Astley-Brown's obvious talent. Be it his ear for melody, knack for riffage or penchant for outright shred, there's no denying that the ace Fernandes-slinger knows his way around a fretboard. As a result, Maebe's self-titled 2020 debut set a relatively high standard.

"Going into the new one, *Rebirth. Relive. Repeat.*, I said, 'Okay, I've established the Maebe sound; now I've got to take it to the extreme.' I wanted the quiet bits to be quieter and the louder bits to be louder and to build on what I thought the strongest parts of the first album were."

As a journalist by day (he's *Guitar World*'s digital editor-in-chief), Astley-Brown has done well with the written word. But ironically, he reaches the greatest depths of human emotion through his instrumentals. And that's no accident.

"The album's title [Rebirth. Relive. Repeat.] relates to mental health," he says. "But it also relates to my growth as a guitar player and my thoughts on how guitar, overall, needs to evolve. The idea of how we can move past something mentally, but still have it come back later, triggering a memory — or that same sort of feeling to where you relive it — is present throughout this album."

When asked which songs best define the sentiment permeating the confines of his expansive sophomore outing, Astley-Brown ponders before saying, "I knew this would be my last album as a solo artist, as I've got a proper band now. I wanted this to be my definitive statement, and so songs such as 'Tautology,' 'Malaise' and 'Stay Together for the Cats' have a lot of my personal history in them. But beyond that, *Rebirth. Relive. Repeat.* is a statement about how I felt about guitar playing overall. There's a lot of repetition when you're practicing guitar. I felt it was necessary to stress that guitar has to change, grow and develop. It has to go through its rebirth, but it also must channel the past, which is the 'reliving' part. And it'll have to keep doing that, which is where the repeating comes in. I suppose it ended up being quite a grand ethos about growth, finding your tribe, speaking the same musical language and, most of all, acceptance."

INTRODUCING

Garrett T. Willie

Same Pain (Garrett T. Willie Records/Orchard)
SOUND Sounding like the unlikely offspring of George Thorogood and Tom Waits, Canadian-born Willie's guitar spits and snarls venomously blistering blues lines, while his vocals convey a depth of emotion way beyond his 23 years. The songs eschew tired 12-bar cliches, mixing ferocious slide lines with sinewy, insidiously melodic minor-key workouts.
KEY TRACK "Black Shiny Shoes"

Atena

Subway Anthem (Indie Recordings)
SOUND These Norwegians combine elements of hardcore, hip-hop and electronica. At times sounding like a cross between Slipknot and Faith No More, Vebjorn Iverson's imaginative guitar lines turn on a dime, from bright jangle to doom-laden, grinding thrash. Jakob Skogli's distinctive vocals take the music to unexpected places.
KEY TRACK "Ultra Ultimate Opus Power"

Velvet Insane

High Heeled Monster (Sound Pollution)
SOUND These Swedish classic rockers combine the best of the Stones, Mott the Hoople and Aerosmith. It's the perfect soundtrack for burning down the highway of desire, as Jimi might say. Guitarist Jesper Lindgren has memorized the guitar hero playbook and spins familiar lines into something uniquely his own.
KEY TRACK "Bamalama Breakout"
— Mark McStea

ELLIE ROGERS (MAEBE) PROVIDED/PR (WILLIE) EDDIE BERG (ATENA) DAVID GUSTAVVSON (VELVET)

Skindred

GUITARIST MIKEY DEMUS ON SPLICING REGGAE WITH METAL AND CREATING SOUNDS THAT CROSS BORDERS AND BOUNDARIES

By Amit Sharma

Mikey Demus — with one of his new-ish Manson signature models — at Glastonbury 2023 in the U.K.

WHEN IT COMES to his day job as the six-string protagonist in Welsh reggae metal quartet Skindred, Mikey Demus admits he's been incredibly fortunate. Most guitar players get to hone in on one or two styles in any given project. With Skindred, who are releasing their eighth full-length, *Smile*, this year, he gets to wear all sorts of different hats and showcase a variety of musical personalities. "That's a good way of putting it, actually — playing these different characters," he tells *GW*. "I get to cover a lot of ground, from how I play to the sounds I dial in and the gear I use. It's a lucky coincidence."

On their latest recordings, songs like "Our Religion" and "If I Could" document his love for high-gain metal tones while elsewhere, on tracks like "L.O.V.E. (Smile Please)," "This Appointed Love" and "Mama," he dials in cleaner sounds for rhythms that delve heavily into the world of dancehall and ska. Obsessing over artists as diverse as Jamiroquai, Rage Against the Machine, the Specials and Bob Marley throughout his teen years led to developing an extremely well-rounded musical palette and the ability to seamlessly chop and change through a smorgasbord of influences.

"The guitar seems to have a different role in a lot of Jamaican music," he says. "It's almost more about what you don't play and how you leave space for other things like vocals or horns. The worst thing you can do is come out with some sledgehammer guitar riff when there's no space for it. Instead I might mimic what the bass is doing, playing staccato single string notes clean. Other times it might be more of a skank, which I try not to do too much. What gets me really excited is finding noises that don't sound like guitar at all."

"I don't even know if Bryan Adams is aware, but there's one of my pedals in his rig!"

For the sessions, Demus plugged his 2017 Manson MD2 signature prototype into a 50-watt Marshall JMP MKII through a Blackstar Artisan cabinet via his Angry Rhubarb Paradynamic Overdrive. The pedal is made by Red Beard Effects, the company he started with Adrian Thorpe of ThorpyFX back in 2019. "It's my go-to overdrive, and it ends up being a favorite for most people who try it," Demus says. "I actually just found out Bryan Adams is using one! [*Laughs*] His tech stumbled across our stuff and figured Bryan would love it. I don't even know if Bryan's aware, but there's one of my pedals in his rig... which is fucking mental!"

JIM DYSON/REDFERNS

Jennifer Batten in 2019 [*right*] and her pedalboard in 2023

MY PEDALBOARD

JENNIFER BATTEN

WHAT THE FORMER MICHAEL JACKSON AND JEFF BECK AX-SLINGER SEES WHEN SHE LOOKS DOWN

Interview by Andrew Daly

"MY PEDALBOARD IS about simplicity. Weight is also huge because 99 percent of my gigs involve getting me on a plane. I also need functionality. But the funny thing is I don't even really like pedals. I got into them when I started doing clinic tours for DigiTech in the Nineties. Since then, I've used them, but constantly stomping on different pedals to get what I need is still bonkers.

"It starts with the board itself, a D'Addario XPND. From there, I have my amp, the BluGuitar AMP1 [*Mercury Edition*]. I was Thomas Blug's first customer. It's a 100-watt, four-channel amp, and it's MIDI capable. That leads me to the next thing, a MeloAudio MIDI Commander [*multi-effects USB MIDI foot controller*], which switches my effects and the amp simultaneously.

"From there, I have an MXR [*M293*] Mini Booster. I like that little box; it does the job when I need a little extra during solos. I had a full-sized one, but it was a tank. Aside from that, I've got a Line 6 [*EX-1*] Expression Pedal and a Boss [*FV-50*] stereo volume pedal. And I have a Line 6 HX Stomp XL [*multi-effects processor*] with a steampunk skin design by Chad Boston at Gear by CEBA. The Line 6 stuff has got a Whammy that goes down a whole step, and it also lets me program in some cool slide effects. Plus, it all fits in my carry-on.

"The funny thing is I don't even really like pedals"

"As simple as my board is, the cabling is not. I've got cabling going between everything, and I color-code it all to keep it straight. And I always take a spare snake in case a cable goes out. If I lose one of the cables, I have no time to troubleshoot it. So I slam a whole new color-coded snake in when that happens."

IF I HAD TO CHOOSE ONE PEDAL FOR A FULL SHOW:

"That's a trick question because I need that BluGuitar AMP1; otherwise, there's no sound. But assuming I've got that, it'd be the Line 6 HX Stomp XL because it has everything under the sun. The way I can route everything through that is so powerful. It's almost like a preset pedalboard on its own since it can be kicked up to eight effects simultaneously, with tons of presets and nerdy guitar stuff."

OLLY CURTIS/FUTURE (BATTEN) COURTESY OF JENNIFER BATTEN (BOARD)

TRIPTYCH

THE POWER OF THREE

Pushing the boundaries of vintage Strat tones into uncharted territories of super heavy fuzz-drenched riffing

"For me, the perfect Strat tone has been an ongoing journey for the last few years, and I'm happy to say that the journey has ended with the Triptych single coils"

RABEA MASSAAD

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Bare Knuckle

Nicholaus Arson (a.k.a. Niklas Almqvist — or is it vice versa?) in action in Madrid in 2019. And no, his Tele doesn't have scoliosis; it's just the victim of a fisheye lens

"Bleeding fingers? I would consider that normal for a rock 'n' roll guitar player — that should be on your CV!"

Bad Case of the Hives?

THE HIVES' NICHOLAUS ARSON AND VIGILANTE CARLSTROEM THEORIZE ON *THE DEATH OF RANDY FITZSIMMONS*

By Gregory Adams

THERE'S ALWAYS BEEN an air of mystery surrounding Randy Fitzsimmons, the elusive songwriter reportedly behind the Hives' sizeable catalog of garage rock sizzlers. According to the Swedish quintet, the enigmatic figure gave them their sound, not to mention their famously sartorial finesse. Trouble is, no one's ever seen the guy, outside of the Hives.

Over the years, sleuths sniffed out that Fitzsimmons may actually be a registered *nom de plume* for founding guitarist Nicholaus Arson (a.k.a. Niklas Almqvist); the six-stringer has long maintained, however, that Fitzsimmons isn't a character, but rather a ringleader who prefers to stand outside of the limelight. Nevertheless, if the group had been under the tutelage of the incognito impresario for the past 30 years, there now seems to be an imposing finality baked into the title of the Hives' latest album, *The Death of Randy Fitzsimmons*.

While Arson, co-guitarist Vigilante Carlstroem, vocalist Howlin' Pelle Almqvist, drummer Chris Dangerous and bassist The Johan and Only have remained a force to be reckoned with on global stages, at a certain point the group realized they hadn't released a full-length since 2012's *Lex Hives*. In turn, they once again sought out their favorite songwriter for a few new tunes. As lore has it, they hadn't been in touch with Fitzsimmons for quite some time and had a hard time tracking him down in the flesh. The specifics are as fuzzy as Arson and Carlstroem's stompbox-assisted riff play, but eventually they came across a coffin. But instead of finding their friend inside, they unearthed the blueprints for their next album.

"We don't know how he died, and we don't necessarily know if he's dead, either," a non-committal Arson offers to *Guitar World* of Fitzsimmons' ultimate fate. "The wicked treasure hunt that he sent us on led us to something that he'd created, more so than a dead body. That's what made up the foundation of the record — demos, notebooks, suits. The working title in the notebooks was *The Death of Randy Fitzsimmons*. Whether he's dead or not, that's hard to say."

Less cryptic are the Hives' vital-as-ever tunes. The band first caught fire internationally during the early '00s garage rock boom, though the Hives stood apart from much of that turn-of-the-century hipsterdom. In contrast to cool-and-collected peers like the Strokes, the Hives were a wide-grinning wrecking ball of mic-swinging, kit-destroying, sweat-slicked showmanship. Two decades later, *The Death of Randy Fitzsimmons* doubles down on that kind of kinetic energy through anthems like "Countdown to Shutdown," a searing salvo of staccato barre chord work and hooky chromatic descension.

"I really love the riffy Hives songs," Arson says with regards to how "Countdown to Shutdown" fits in among their classics. "I mean, that song is almost like a greatest hits of Hives tricks. We're talking about that chromatic thing in the beginning, which is something we used on 'The Hives — Declare Guerre Nucleaire.' [*The chorus of 'Countdown to Shutdown' is*] up there with 'Tick Tick Boom' or 'Main Offender'... It's a very, very Hives song, to me."

Overall, the guitarist explains that the act wanted their latest collection to be "rowdy and energetic" — that certainly fits the bill through firecrackers like "Bogus Operandi" and the barely minute-long "Trapdoor Solution." Tone-wise, Arson

JAVIER BRAGADO/WIREIMAGE

Vigilante Carlstroem with his 1959 Epiphone Coronet. "I've told the other guys that if that guitar gets stolen, I have to quit the band," he says

suggests they might've upped the fuzz a smidge since *Lex Hives*, whether boosting signals with his Crowther Prunes & Custard stompbox or Carlstroem's Z. Vex Fuzz Factory. In other regards, they stuck to tried-and-true pieces of gear, like the vintage push of a pair of tweed-face Fender amps.

For guitars, Arson's a big believer in the twangy bite of a Telecaster, preferring the hot coils of his Seventies-era Custom's bridge pickup in particular. Carlstroem's main guitar is the '59 Epiphone Coronet he picked up on tour at a Chicagoland music store about 20 years ago. He says the double cutaway solidbody was in mint condition at the time, but the black paint on its top horn has progressively eroded toward more of a natural wood finish, due to the Vigilante's aggressive downstroking.

"I've pretty much played it every show for the [*past two decades*]; it feels like it's a part of me," he says of the road-worn character piece, adding with a chuckle, "I've told the other guys that if that guitar gets stolen, I have to quit the band. Sometimes it gets stuck at the airport and I'll have to play another guitar, but it feels weird!"

Something the Hives have settled into, however, is an un-precious approach to soloing. This perhaps dates all the way back to the junked-and-skronked, two-second micro-leads Carlstroem peppered into "Main Offender," off the band's 2000 breakthrough, *Veni Vidi Vicious*. That sense of impactful economy exists on *The Death of Randy Fitzsimmons*, too. Take the Vigilante's curt blur of tremolo-picked high-stringing on "Stick Up." Though seemingly cut from the same slashed speaker cloth as Link Wray, Carlstroem's playing might actually have more in common with Fats Domino.

"I was trying to play piano, but on the guitar," he recalls of tracking *The Death of Randy Fitzsimmons*' biggest, yet still bite-sized guitar solo. "We got the demo from Randy Fitzsimmons, and it was just a fuzz guitar and some piano. That's all we had to work with, so for [*my*] lead guitar, I'm trying to recreate the piano part. I think we might have piano on the recording as well, but that's how the lead ended up."

In the lead up to *The Death of Randy Fitzsimmons*, Hives vocalist Howlin' Pelle Almqvist — Arson's younger brother — talked up how rock 'n' roll is something of a "perpetual teenager," adding that the Hives aren't interested in maturing their garage rock for the masses. That's not to say the Hives haven't evolved since first forming as a group of pubescent punks in smalltown Fagersta, Sweden.

It's now been close to 30 years since the band recorded 1994's *Sounds Like Sushi* demo. Back then, the teens anchored into the high velocity, snot-and-sugar smarm of Nineties skate punk. They soon signed with their home country's Burning Heart Records, placing them alongside equally Speedy Swedes like Millencolin and Satanic Surfers. Even so, the demo did offer a peak of what was to come via the primordial garage clang of "Radio Blast." The band — or, rather, behind-the-scenes svengali Fitzsimmons — fine-tuned that song's raw and raucous approach for 1997 full-length *Barely Legal*, and perfected the process before going supernova with *Veni Vidi Vicious*. Outside of catching a live show, though, the past decade has been a drought for Hives obsessives. And while some solid rock records have been issued since then, arguably few have been able to pop off with the same kind of brash joie-de-vivre as the self-described "Champagne of Bands."

"There are a bunch of really good rock bands that we like — we've really enjoyed watching the rise of the Viagra Boys, just to mention our Swedish colleagues here — but the Hives are one of a kind," Arson suggests of staying at the top of the heap. "The throne was never really in jeopardy"

Though *The Death of Randy Fitzsimmons* has the Hives as confident as ever, the modern rock landscape is not without its perils. While out on tour with Arctic Monkeys this past summer, an on-stage gaffe found Arson stepping on a cable that sent a mic flying straight into his brother's skull. The frontman was left bloodied at the brow, but the band gleefully pushed through a painful moment. "We've fallen off a stage at one point or another, but we haven't really broken anything," Arson reveals when asked if he's suffered similar injuries. Carlstroem adds that he and his bandmate have worked their fingers to the bone throughout their garage-punk journey, bloodying countless strings and fretboards along the way. That's all part of the job, though, per Arson.

"Bleeding fingers? I would consider that normal for a rock 'n' roll guitar player — that should be on your CV!"

"The Hives are one of a kind. The throne was never really in jeopardy"

AXOLOGY

- **GUITARS** Fender Telecasters (Arson); 1959 Epiphone Coronet (Carlstroem)
- **AMPS** Fender Vibrolux, Standel Custom, Fender Princeton (Arson); Magnatone, Fender Vibro-King (Carlstroem)
- **EFFECTS** Crowther Prunes & Custard fuzz, Boss Digital Delay, Boss Dynamic Wah (Arson); BJF Deep Blue Delay, Z. Vex Fuzz Factory, octave pedal (Carlstroem)

DANIEL BOCZARSKI/REDFERNS

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Annie Shred

HOW THE IRRESISTIBLE WORLD OF SHRED GUITAR CLAIMED YET ANOTHER FORMER PIANO PLAYER

By Joe Bosso

ANY GUITARIST WHO calls herself "Annie Shred" had better prove it — and Annie Grunwald, the seven-string-wielding front person for the L.A.-based band Shadow Cliq, does so in grand fashion. On videos posted to her various social media pages, she sweeps, taps and blitzes her way through a dizzying assortment of well-known solos and licks (everything from Rage Against the Machine to Gorija) as well as her own bruising metallic runs. And just to keep everybody on their toes, she throws in a curve or two, like her shimmering cover of the Killers' "Mr. Brightside."

"People have really responded to the clips I've done," Grunwald says. "As a guitarist, it's been validating and exciting to see the reactions I get from viewers. If there's an agenda to it all, it's just to show people that you can enjoy playing any kind of music. Why limit yourself?"

Originally a pianist, Grunwald switched to guitar at age 14 when she heard Green Day. "I was 100 percent all in for Billie Joe Armstrong," she enthuses. Quickly, however, she discovered more technical players like Paul Gilbert and Lamb of God's Mark Morton. "Then I got into death metal, and things got more intense. Because I started on the piano, my dexterity was already developed. I loved playing scales, so it was fun for me to whip my fingers all over the neck of the guitar."

AXOLOGY

- **GUITARS** Kiesel 7-String Custom X-Type (with custom Seymour Duncan Blackouts HB Coil Pack system)
- **AMPS** Neural DSP Quad Cortex (direct into the house PA)

Annie Shred with her Kiesel 7-String Custom X-Type

"Because I started on the piano, my dexterity was already developed. I loved playing scales, so it was fun to whip my fingers all over the neck of the guitar"

After studying at Berklee College of Music and playing in metal bands throughout her home state of Connecticut, Grunwald headed to Los Angeles, where she formed Shadow Cliq with her DJ/guitarist boyfriend Danny Dodge and drummer Johnny Tuosto. "We call our music 'future metal,' but that's sort of meaningless," Grunwald says. "Any genre of music can fit into what we do. Rules needn't apply."

Shadow Cliq's new single, "Ultraviolent," bears this out. A collaboration with dubstep DJ Kill the Noise, it's a mind-blowing assemblage of shred guitar and madcap electronic highjinks. Meanwhile, another new single, "*SAYMYNAME!*," hints at what's in store on their forthcoming EP, *Violent Communication*.

"We're constantly asking ourselves, 'What's missing in music?' Greenwald says. "The answer is, 'Whatever we do next.'"

EKATERINA GORBACHEVA

King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard guitarists Joey Walker [*left*] and Stu Mackenzie do their thing in Milan earlier this year

Merciless Self-Evaluation

A 1.5-PAGE CHAT WITH JOEY WALKER, KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD'S RESIDENT SHRED LORD. OR DO WE ALL JUST THINK HE'S A SHRED LORD?

By Andrew Daly

IT'S NO SECRET that Aussie-based psych/garage/prog/heavy metal act King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard have been keeping a furious pace. But to be specific, since 2012, the group has somehow, someway, released 24 full-length studio albums. And considering how absurd that is, you shouldn't feel bad if you can't recall the name of the group's latest record. In fact, not even the band's longtime co-shred lord, Joey Walker, can keep up.

"Oh, man, I won't even try and pronounce, let alone recall, the name of the new album," he says. "I just know that it's a continuation of what we've been doing, and we love it."

The album in question — *PetroDragonic Apocalypse; or, Dawn of Eternal Night: An Annihilation of Planet Earth and the Beginning of Merciless Damnation* (how's that for a mouthful!) — is precisely as Walker describes: a continuation.

But considering the sheer bulk of music coupled with the consistent quality, the first question that comes to mind is: How? To that end, Walker says, "In some ways, it's hard to keep up, but I won't lie; I relish the challenge. Sometimes we venture into territories that I feel are out of my depth, but I'm fine with it. If we weren't doing that, I don't think we'd be able to keep pace with what we're trying to do."

"I feel like an imposter in that respect. I think people consider me a better guitarist than I actually am"

Walker's statement raises another question: What exactly is King Gizzard trying to do? Then again, perhaps that remains as open to debate as the themes inherent in the band's music. But, of course, Walker and his cohorts in King Gizzard wouldn't have it any other way. Indeed, for these titans of genre-bending, creativity is the name of the game. And with that, everything else falls into place.

"People often ask how we stay creative," Walker says. "And really, we pull from all different areas. Much of it comes from our live jams, meaning we'll extract bits and pieces we like and save them for later. But sometimes I'm just noodling with seemingly no aim. That's when I'll get frustrated and pissed off and be like, 'Fuck me,' because I'm literally trying to build myself into what we're trying to do, and I'm just sitting there not having any idea what I'm about to do. I guess what I'm trying to say is that I'm on the eternal search for the riff, you know?"

Being a member of King Gizzard is probably nothing short of precarious, especially given that the group's primary songwriters, Stu Mackenzie and Cook Craig, both add their own six-string layers to the band's ever-brewing stew. But as Walker puts it, "finding space" is critical. But the inner machinations of the process, at least for Walker, run far deeper than that.

"I know people see me as this shredding player," he says, "but I don't see myself as a 'shredder' in any way. If you want me to be honest, I feel like an imposter in that respect. I think people consider me a better guitarist than I actually am."

Of course, Walker is too hard on himself, which isn't surprising given that most

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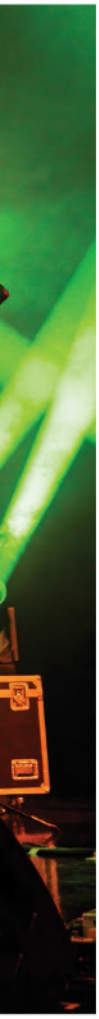

creative folks always carry at least a bit of imposter syndrome. And by the looks of it, those same mental gymnastics fuel Walker rather than hinder him.

"Maybe it is part of the process," he says. "And maybe it's good that I'm not the only guitar player in the band; it allows me to focus more on rhythm and melody. That's more my bag, anyway. But no matter what I'm doing, I'm always sort of flying by the seat of my pants. The reality is that a lot of what I want to do seems to be well outside of my abilities, which is fine because I don't necessarily identify with virtuosic guitar playing. Being technical is nice, but I'd rather focus on feel and groove."

Thinking on his process, perceived ability, and viewpoint, Walker sighs, "I don't know... I feel like I don't even have a 'process.' The idea of that is beyond me. For me, it's about being present in the moment; that's when you become fully open to stumbling upon something unexpected. And so, if we're working on a heavier album, maybe I'll go into the studio, turn the distortion up and let things happen as they're meant to. It's not much more complicated than that. If I said, 'I'm gonna try and write something good,' I guarantee I'd fail 10 out of 10 times."

Regardless of if Walker feels he's "far worse than people think," King Gizzard's latest features more than a few heroic moments which bear his signature, "I'm especially proud of 'Dragon,'" he says. "It was tough to put together and makes the biggest statement. And I love the way 'Flamethrower' came out. It was also hard to record. It went through many iterations before we settled on what you hear. I'm proud of it."

With 24 records unleashing in 11 years, one would think King Gizzard might be considering taking some time off. But if Walker is to be believed, the still-spinning creative hamster wheel he's running on won't stop anytime soon.

"It's tiring," Walker says with a laugh. "But Stu is a maniac when it comes to songwriting. His instincts are to be compulsive when it comes to creating music. And honestly, we're all that way. I don't think we'd know what to do with ourselves if we stopped. So we've weaponized that mindset and utilized it to great lengths.

"There are no signs of slowing down. We've never had more energy, if you can believe that. I've never been more excited; this is the most inspiring time in our history. We'll keep doing stuff and experimenting for the foreseeable future. Our 25th album is near completion. And once again, it's an absolute U-turn. So it's fucking all systems go."

Danni Stefanetti with her PRS Silver Sky

Danni Stefanetti

THE AUSSIE-TURNED-LA SONGSTRESS PROMISES A ROCKING, RIFF-PACKED ABOUT-FACE ON HER UPCOMING STUDIO OUTING

By Joe Bosso

AFTER DANNI STEFANETTI bombed as a teenage ballet dancer, her mother gave her a choice between taking up the guitar or violin. "Not many girls my age were playing guitar at the time, so that's what I picked," Stefanetti says. "Right away, I felt like I'd found my calling. I was a terrible dancer, but everything about the guitar felt so right to me."

The Australian-born guitarist considers herself something of "an old soul in a young body" — she cut her teeth jamming along to her father's CD collection, which was big on blues and classic rock. "I got into Eric Clapton and Stevie Ray Vaughan — anything with epic guitar playing," she says. "My guitar teacher would show me Jimi Hendrix solos. I'd come back the next week and be able to play them myself."

But Stefanetti is a little bit country as well, especially in terms of songwriting. She cites Dolly Parton, Alison Krauss and fellow Aussie Keith Urban as major influences. "The Eagles, too," she says. "To me, they're very country."

By 16, Stefanetti was writing and singing her own country-rock material, appearing on TV shows and bagging songwriter awards. Having taken her career as far as she could in Australia, she relocated to Los Angeles and hit the clubs with her three-piece band, wowing audiences at the Hotel Café and the Peppermint Club. Earlier this year, she released a concert CD, *Live at Big Bear*, and she's now deep into recording her first proper studio album.

"I've concentrated on ballads for a while, but this record is going to rock," Stefanetti says. "The riffs are crazy. If I had to describe the songs, they're like Bonnie Raitt meets Sheryl Crow meets Joe Walsh meets the Stones — with hints of INXS."

A devoted PRS player, Stefanetti was recently chosen for the company's 2023 Pulse program, which she calls "a very high honor. Some of my favorite guitarists play PRS. I absolutely love their guitars. When John Mayer came out with his Silver Sky model, I knew I had to have one. It's my main guitar now. It fits me like a glove, and it plays and sounds like a dream."

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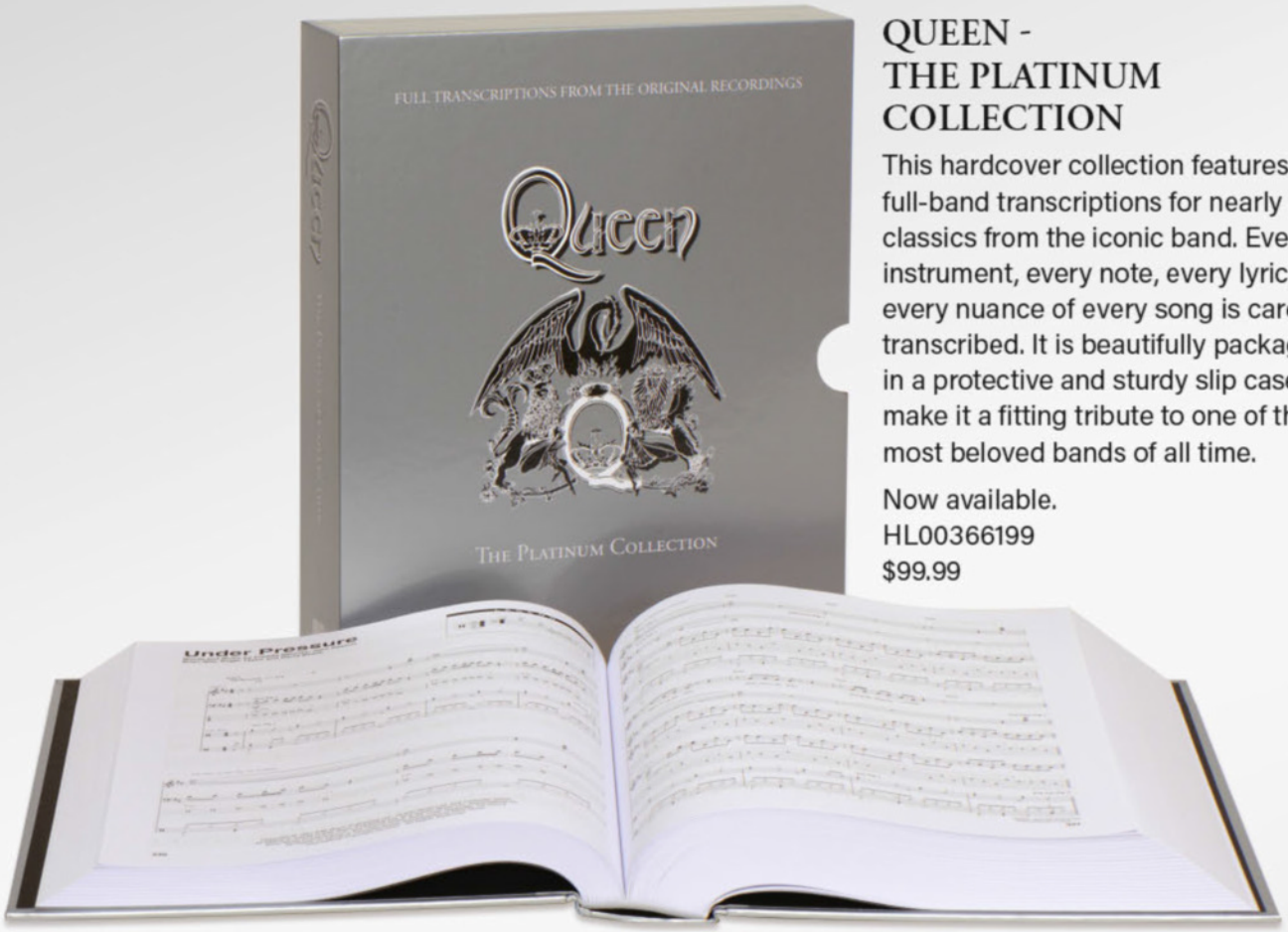

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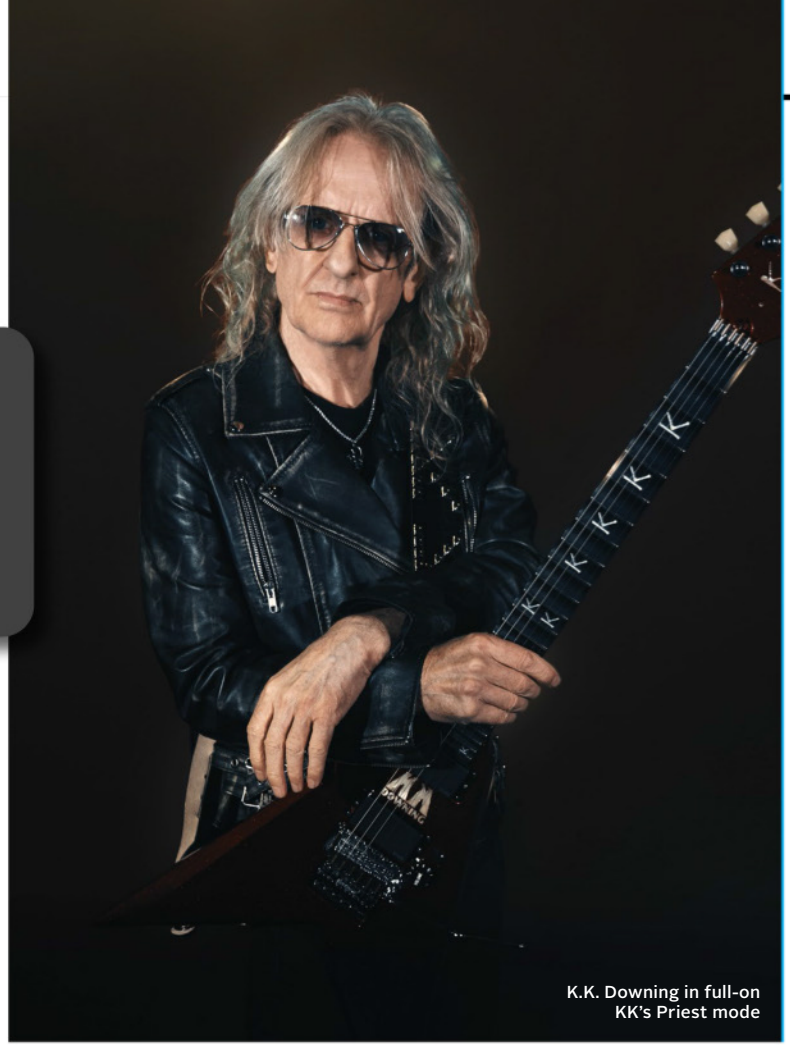

K.K. Downing in full-on KK's Priest mode

PROVIDED/PR

K.K. DOWNING

The original "Sinner" takes you behind the scenes of his recent one-off reunion with Judas Priest — and the turbo-charged new album by KK's Priest

By Jon Wiederhorn

IT LASTED FOR just over seven minutes, but what a glorious 420-plus seconds it was. Judas Priest's pioneering guitarists Glenn Tipton and K.K. Downing were back onstage together for the first time in more than 11 years playing some of their biggest hits to a worldwide audience.

The celebration took place November 5, 2022, in the Microsoft Theater (Los Angeles) at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony, where Judas Priest received the Lifetime Achievement Award. Following a brief introduction by Alice Cooper, the band barreled through "You've Got Another Thing Coming," "Living After Midnight" and "Breaking the Law" as celebrities including Dave Grohl and Drew Barrymore raised their fists and sang along.

Downing was joined on stage by the band's current guitarist, Richie Faulkner, and both seemed to have the same fashion designer and hairdresser. Wearing the band's patented studded black leather, wielding Flying V guitars and bobbing their flowing blond tresses, their chemistry was as tight as their precision riffing and synchronized stage moves. On the other side of the stage were bassist Ian Hill and Tipton, the latter wearing a Judas Priest baseball cap and eyeglasses and playing a black Hamer Phantom. Possibly due to his worsening Parkinson's condition, Tipton remained fairly stationary and glanced downward — an elder statesman calmly taking in the voluble scene and reaping the rewards of 50-plus years of dedication to his craft.

Onstage, vocalist Rob Halford stood as one with Downing. Offstage and before the show, the environment wasn't so friendly. Downing wasn't allowed to walk the red carpet with his former bandmates, had a separate dressing room and received the cold shoulder from everyone in the band except Faulkner, who replaced Downing when he left the band. Even so, Downing wasn't about to let ugly politics ruin a good party.

"I was flying high, and It was fantastic," Downing says, recalling the performance. "I was there for the fans who wanted to see me with Priest again, and it was a great moment. People loved it and lots of them said hello, including Richie, who was really nice and really cool. I wish I could say the same for my former bandmates."

Downing officially quit Judas Priest in 2011. Due to personal and musical tensions that had grown over the years between him and some of his bandmates, he opted not to play their planned last hurrah, the Epitaph Tour. Downing insists the band agreed to break up after the final date of the lengthy run.

"Everybody went, 'He jumped ship. He left our beloved Priest,'" Downing says. "That wasn't the case at all. If I'd have known that the last tour wasn't going to be the last tour and they'd be carrying on for another 10 years, things would probably have been a lot different."

When Downing bowed out, Judas Priest recruited Faulker, who breathed new life into the band, and with whom Judas Priest has continued to tour and record. Faulkner played on 2014's *Redeemer of Souls* and 2018's *Fire-*

"PEOPLE LOVED IT AND LOTS OF THEM SAID HELLO, INCLUDING RICHIE [FAULKNER], WHO

power and toured for both albums. Downing never hoped to replace Faulkner; however, when Tipton announced he was too ill from Parkinson's to tour, Downing contacted management and expressed interest in rejoining, but too much bad blood had passed under the bridge for the members to accept his offer. Instead, they hired their producer, Andy Sneap, to join them onstage.

"I graciously requested to return when there was an opportunity, but the guys in the band said, 'No. We don't want you.' I said, 'Are you sure? Before I start another project, are you sure you don't want me back in the band?' Rob, Glenn and Ian said, 'No,' and that was it."

Downing says he was especially upset at being rejected since he had supported Halford's decision to rejoin Judas Priest after a 14-year hiatus. And he sat back and patiently waited for six years while Tipton worked on the project Tipton, Entwistle & Powell, which released *Edge of the World* in 2006. When it became clear as unblemished crystal that no one in Judas Priest's camp wanted Downing back, he took his gear, instantly recognizable tone and familiar songwriting style and soaked it all in a vat of piss and vinegar. Then he connected with former Judas Priest vocalist Tim "Ripper" Owens, who sang for Judas Priest between 1996 and 2003 (while Halford was working on Fight, Halford and 2wo), and the two formed KK's Priest, a searing, soaring metal band that takes no great pains to differentiate itself sonically from the music Downing co-wrote in Judas Priest.

"Here's the thing," Downing says. "Judas Priest was my baby. I created it. I stuck with it from the very beginning. I hired other people to be a part of the band and then it was my life. It was my career. It was my legacy. It was my legend. And the hardest thing in the world was letting it go. And now I'm acknowledging I am no longer a member of Judas Priest, but I am still a large part of Judas Priest, and anyone who knows the band can tell that by listening to what I'm doing now."

KK's Priest released their debut album, *Sermons of the Sinner*, October 1, 2021. In addition to drawing from Judas Priest's trademark musical style, Downing referenced Priest songs including "Sinner" in the title cut, "The Sentinel" in "Return of the Sentinel" and his own history in "Hail for the Priest." Since the Covid pandemic prevented KK's Priest from touring, Downing kept writing riffs, leads and lyrics, and less than six months after wrapping *Sermons of the Sinner*, he finished writing *The Sinner Rides Again*. With a lineup that features Owens, guitarist A.J. Mills, bassist Tony Newton and drummer Sean Elg, the band spent the summer playing a handful of festivals and a couple of shows at K.K.'s club in Wolverhampton, KK's Steel Mill.

"Wolverhampton is right outside of Birmingham, and we used to play there a lot in the early Priest days," he says. During the band's July 6 show at KK's Steel Mill, the band played nine Judas Priest songs (including their cover of Fleetwood Mac's "The Green Manalishi") and six numbers by KK's Priest.

"I like to do a good cross-section of songs from the first two albums along with some Priest songs the fans want to hear," he says. "We have videos for six new songs, and as we keep releasing tracks from the new album, we'll keep adding them to the set."

At the moment, Downing is spending some down time at home before heading out for more shows in October. While he still has several sour grapes to flick at some of his former bandmates, he seems less bitter than he was when he released *Sermons of the Sinner* and more intent to focus on the promising future of KK's Priest than dwell on any past misfortune.

Judas Priest fans seemed to be split on *Sermons of the Sinner*. Some heralded it as a thrilling return to form; others thought it was a reflection of an artist trying to recapture his former glory.

It's a strange world, isn't it? The set of circumstances about my departure from the band were so heavily misconstrued that people formed an opinion right away about me. Management put out a press release: "K.K. has retired from Judas Priest." Everyone thought I was leaving to open a golf course. Priest fans didn't understand the situation and couldn't understand what I was upset about. But now we're working with some new people and we're on a new label and I'm looking forward to moving on with KK's Priest.

At what point did you accept that you couldn't live in the past and you had to move on with a new band?

It was very hard to have to give up the baton to new blood. Lots of tears were shed and there were lots of sleepless nights. People thought I was an asshole. But that wasn't it. I was completely dedicated to metal and the legacy of it, as I am today. The truth is, I gave up touring with Priest because I was worn down and I felt battered. I felt beaten. I felt like I haven't got a voice. I felt I was being trod upon — even right up to the point of the farewell tour. So I just keep it going in my own way.

At this point, there's no reason metal fans should have to choose between the Rob Halford-fronted Judas Priest and KK's Priest. You aren't sports teams.

I was the K.K. in Judas Priest and now I've got KK's Priest because I'm the same player. I've got the same articulation. I'm using the same amps and speakers, the same approach to what I think a good song should be. I've got the same ideas about what makes a good guitar sound and a good lead sound. I'm just doing what I started to do in the early days.

Do you feel that KK's Priest resembles early Judas Priest?

Not really, because back then my musical vocabulary was quite limited. It was acceptable for the day. It's more like I'm starting over now with this band that isn't that well known yet. In the late Sixties and Seventies, I primarily played the major and minor pentatonic and the Aeolian scale, which is the natural minor scale, which is my personal favorite, and it's the same as the relative major scale. Other than that, we would do a few chromatic things, or we'd take things from different styles without knowing what the scales were. Maybe we did do something that was diminished, but at the time we didn't know it was from the diminished scale. We just liked how it sounded. But when you educate yourself, you start to integrate all these other scales — the harmonic minor, the Ionian and others so that you've got a bigger, louder voice. I enjoy integrating all of these styles so there are a lot more tools in that toolbox than I had in 1971, and that helps a lot with songwriting.

In any way, do you want KK's Priest to sound different from what you

WAS REALLY NICE AND REALLY COOL. I WISH I COULD SAY THE SAME FOR MY FORMER BANDMATES"

[*left*] K.C. Downing with Tim "Ripper" Owens; [*right*] Downing reunites with Judas Priest's Rob Halford, November 5, 2022

FROM LEFT: PROVIDED/PR THEO WARGO/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME

wrote in Judas Priest?
For the first record, I was happy to have a bit of a retro sound, where some of those songs could have been created in the Seventies, Eighties or Nineties. I think this one is good for the present day with an eye toward the future. But a song like "Brothers of the Road" is about guys in metal bands meeting up backstage at festivals and gigs. We are all road warriors. Sometimes we're out there for months on end with a suitcase full of dirty clothes, but we get on with it and we get the job done, and we enjoy it. That could have been on [*Judas Priest's 1981 album*] *Point of Entry*. It's the same idea as "Heading Out to the Highway." But the tones are a little bit more edgy because it adds to the excitement of the songs. It's a bit more risky, a bit more gung-ho. A bit more, Let's fucking get out there and rock!

***Sermons of the Sinner* made it perfectly clear that you own your sound. Why not modify it even more on *The Sinner Rides Again* by using different production techniques, songwriting styles or guitar tones, and making fewer direct references to Priest songs so no one can accuse you of being stuck in the past?**
Well, I'm not doing this to be a version of something from the past — a different version of Judas Priest. That's not the case at all. All the fans and people that don't get that have to understand that I was there at the very beginning. I always wanted to be in Judas Priest even before I auditioned for Judas Priest and failed. I knew I had to go back. I kept knocking on the door until I got through it [*toward the end of 1969*]. And I was able to invite people into that band. I brought Glenn into Priest in 1974. He was much more commercially minded than me, but I knew he was a good player. I wanted somebody that could play leads, write songs and play rhythm as well. And I thought having two guitarists would really impact the band and make it really strong. I couldn't think of another band like us that had more than one guitar player. There were some, but most of them were in the States. There was Wishbone Ash, but they weren't a heavy rock band. I wanted Glenn and everyone to be a part of this amazing journey to create music that didn't exist.

Like Judas Priest, KK's Priest features two guitarists. How did you hook up with your new sidekick, A.J. Mills?
I went to primary school with A.J.'s uncle, and we've stayed friends. And then A.J. started to play the guitar as a teenager. I've mentored him and his career since then and now he's 34 and he's ready for the big stage. In fact, he's been on it! So that's cool because we're from the same town and there's metal blood in our veins.

A.J. is credited on the first KK's Priest album, but you wrote all the songs.
I was happy to do it myself. But I was equally happy to collaborate with him on two of the new songs because it's good for A.J. to take on more of a role in the band. I'll be 72 this year, and at some point, it would be great if somebody could take over for me, whenever that might be. Hopefully, it's a long way down the line, but you never know. I lost my sister suddenly a few years ago and that scared me, to be honest. It was quite sudden, and she was just 70.

Do you ever think about Glenn and how Parkinson's Disease has impacted what he can do as a guitarist?
It's terribly sad to see what's happened to Glenn. And I'm extremely proud of our relationship and what we did and achieved together. I respect him more than anybody in the band, to be fair, because Glenn was very hardworking, and he had talent. We wrote a lot of great songs together. And on a social level, we did well for a long time.

You've been critical of him in the past,

"IT'S TERRIBLY SAD TO SEE WHAT'S HAPPENED TO GLENN [TIPTON]. I'M EXTREMELY PROUD

even accusing him of drinking too much onstage.
I don't want to speak too much about what was said and done. That's all been beaten into the ground. But there was always a difference between myself and Glenn. He had a different relationship with management than I did, and that became problematic for me. I felt like I had no control over band decisions. But Glenn will always have a place in my heart, as much as we were at loggerheads on lots of things, we made great music together. And maybe even he wasn't in control after a certain point. Who knows? But there's always the other side of the coin and the fans need to realize that.

Do you and A.J. have different playing styles?
Not really. When he was younger, he liked nu metal, but over the years he has looked up to me and my sound. He has played with me for a while, so our styles are similar, and they work well together. He uses heavier strings, so his voicings have a little more low end to them. And we tune down one-half step, so when we fired up his rig and he played through Celestion G12 speakers and started chugging really good, he loved it.

Do you use lighter strings?
I use Dean Markley .08 through .38. I've always done that because I don't have really big, strong hands. I don't think I ever did, but now at my age it's good to have lighter strings. They're easy to bend and they just feel right.

Do you prefer to play runs with legato or alternate picking?
I'll do entire runs through several octaves using all economy picking. I have fun doing that. It's quite a challenge, but I can do it. I can play just as fast when I alternate pick as I can when I use legato. To be perfectly honest, I would use a lot more legato in my sound if I had pulled it off all my life. It's just hard to trust it a little bit and to speak as well with it unless you've really got that overdriven and compressed sound. When you're in the house and you're playing, you get to pull it off. When you've got a big double-bass kit and everything else going off onstage at the same time, well, it's a two-guitar band so it's never a sure thing. If I'm playing a ballad and everybody holds back then, yeah, it's a lot easier to use. And I do use it in a couple of songs now.

You wrote and recorded *Sermons of the Sinner* on your own during Covid in a mere four months. How much of a break did you take before you started writing again for *The Sinner Rides Again*?
When we finished the first record, the Covid thing was still there and the agents were saying, "There's a backlog of bookings and engagements that need to be filled. Don't count your blessings about getting on the road." So I thought to myself, "Well, I'll just do another record." I work spontaneously and fast and I switch onto auto pilot. If it comes out good, it's good. If it doesn't, I'll try something else. But it is what it is because I am who I am. When I sit down to write a song like "One More Shot at Glory," it's a wonderful place for my brain to be in, so no wonder I rock and roll fast and furious and get the job done quickly. I've got so much content to work with. I can't speak for Glenn, but maybe that's why we were so prolific as writers in Judas Priest over the years. If anything, the only thing that really slowed us down was the odd task of having to agree with each other. Now I don't have to do that. I fly on my own and I haven't really done that since 1969, 1970 and 1971 when I was doing the writing back when we were just a four-piece band. It's great to have A.J. involved, but I'm really reveling in the fact that I could sit down and do another album and it would probably only take me three or four weeks to get the content together. That's what happened with the first two records, and that makes me really feel good.

It doesn't sound like the songs on *The Sinner Rides Again* were quickly slapped together. They're filled with strong riffs, memorable choruses, blazing solos and twin-guitar harmonies. And there's no shortage of atmospheric arpeggios, energized rhythm changes and gear-changing rhythm shifts.
When I'm on a roll, all I have to do is settle on the content that inspires me and then the rest is easy. I've been doing this for so long, I feel like it just comes naturally, like I'm pulling it out of the sky. And now I have the confidence to know that there's no lack of quality there.

You were working with former Judas Priest drummer Les Binks before you hired Sean Elg, who also plays in Cage and Nihilist.
Obviously, I really wanted Ripper and Les to bring in more of that spirit of Priest. But Les hurt his wrist pretty badly in an accident and couldn't do it. With the mechanics of having to hit his drums and do that over and over, that's demanding on your body, and with his injury, it just wasn't possible, so we got Sean, and that worked out really well.

"One More Shot at Glory" is pretty poignant. Do you feel this is your last chance to take your music to the masses and prove you're still a powerful force in metal?
That song can be interpreted on several levels. It's about a hero that's won a battle, and going to war, and wielding the sword, which is forged with molten steel, which is very metal. And then that bridge is about me and my conquest, and my fight to return and get back in the saddle. This is one more shot at glory for me. I know the things I've been denied. I shouldn't be in a position where I have to create this on my own and build it up all over again. But I'm forced to do it, so I do it. And I will enjoy it and make it work because metal is always about the fight and the victory. GW

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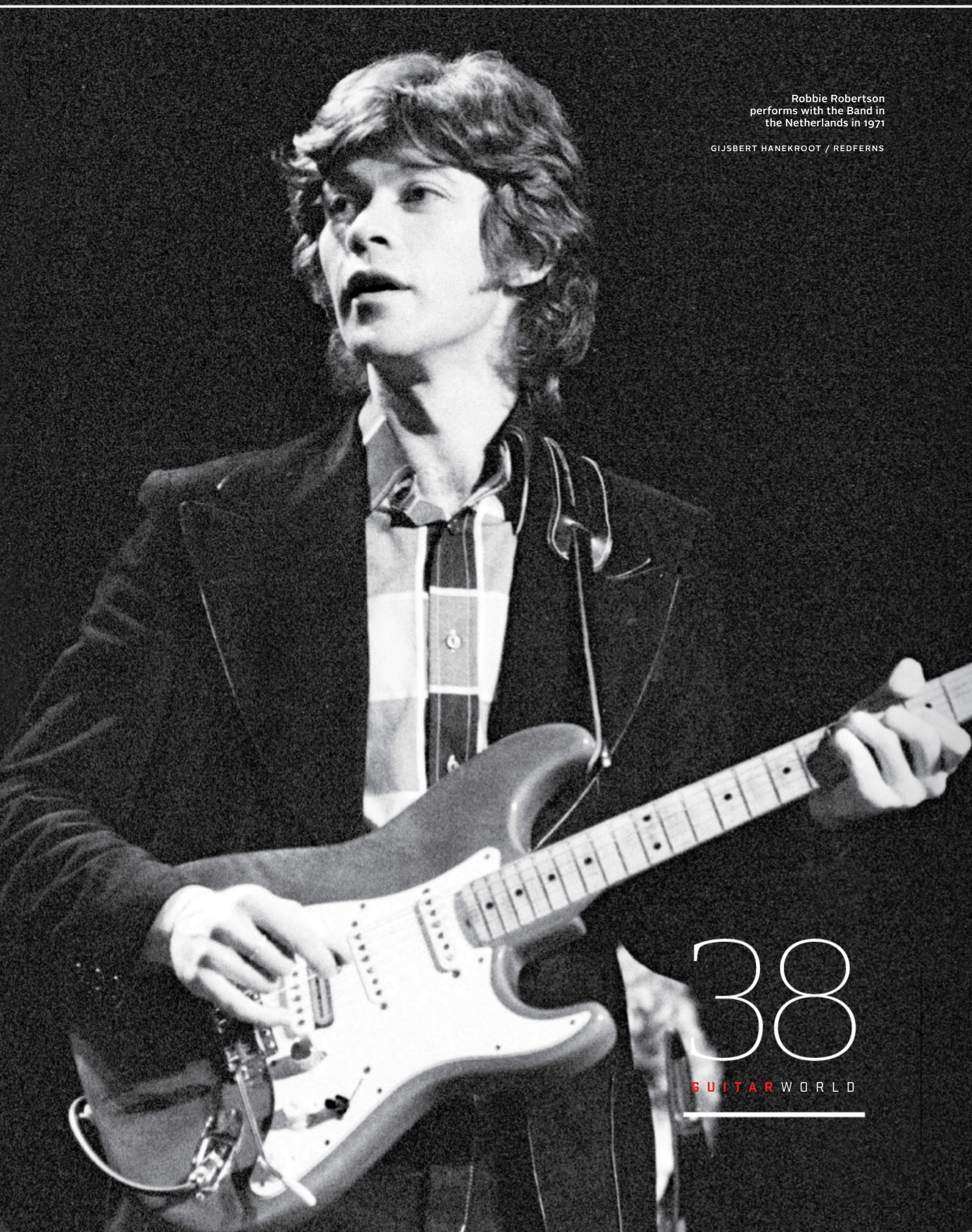

Robbie Robertson performs with the Band in the Netherlands in 1971

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT / REDFERNS

ROBBIE ROBERTSON

GW, with a little help from **WARREN HAYNES,** selects the late Band legend's 10 essential tracks

1943-2023

BY ALAN PAUL

ROBBIE ROBERTSON, WHO died August 9 at age 80, was best known as the guitarist and chief songwriter for the Band. Over the years, his songwriting came to be better known than his guitar playing because of the fantastic catalog of timeless tunes that includes "The Weight," "Up On Cripple Creek" and "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down." But Gov't Mule guitarist Warren Haynes points out that Robertson's playing and writing are so intertwined that they're impossible to separate.

"I think that people who consider themselves songwriters and/or singers as much as musicians have a different way of approaching solos," Haynes says. "Because they're so song oriented, they think not just about the melody or notes of what they're playing, but the lyrics, emotions and mood of the song as well. Robbie's solos and fills always captured the mood, emotions and significance of the songs. They were never just good licks."

Haynes has spent a lot of time doing a deep dive into the music of the Band and Robertson's guitar playing in recent years as he put together and led The Last Waltz Tour, an all-star conglomeration of musicians who have done several tours playing the Band's hits. Breaking down and learning the songs, Haynes was struck by how many of Robertson's guitar licks "feel like they're part of the song."

"That's kind of the challenge in playing his music," Haynes says. "If you're going to cover a song, you have to decide what you want to reinterpret and what you want to pay tribute to and play precisely as composed. I was pretty taken by how many of his parts must be played as written for the song to work — and that's even though he often played them different ways on different performances, or recorded takes."

Even then, Haynes says, the songs of the Band are like architecture, with each musician's playing being completely based on what the others are playing. When one of them changes, they all do, sometimes in subtle ways that may be barely noticeable to a listener but are immediately apparent to a group of musicians trying to recreate the songs.

"They just had that unique chemistry where their personalities all shone, but there was something about the way they blended together that made the whole greater than the sum of its parts — but each little part was essential to that," Haynes says. "When you study what he's actually playing, it can be surprising, especially since there are two keyboards and he's fitting in there between them."

The Band initially came together backing rockabilly singer Ronnie Hawkins, did an intensive internship as Bob Dylan's first electric band in 1965-66, then emerged as a singular artistic voice, creating rock laced with country, blues and other folk music, essentially giving birth to what we now know as the Americana genre. That can all be heard on their

album that had such a profound musical impact on their fellow musicians; Eric Clapton broke up Cream after hearing it; George Harrison went to Woodstock, New York, to ask if he could join the group (The Beatles were still very much together, by the way). They followed that up a year later with a self-titled album so full of classic songs that it could be mistaken for a greatest-hits package. Most of the group's material was written by Robertson, and the Band's first two albums included some of rock's most original, indelible songs, which combine vivid imagery with a touch of impressionism; they sound utterly original and like folk songs that have been passed down for generations.

"Their music was so organic that it sounds like it's been here forever," Haynes says. "At some point, a lot of the music you grew up with doesn't mean as much as it once did; it loses its appeal, even as you can understand why you loved it. The music of the Band just stands up. It's the epitome of timeless music."

With some help from Haynes, we've selected 10 essential tracks to pay tribute to Robertson's legacy.

> "Robbie's solos and fills always captured the mood, emotions and significance of the songs. They were never just good licks"
>
> **WARREN HAYNES**

"Who Do You Love"

The Band, feat. Ronnie Hawkins

The Last Waltz, 1978

While this performance is from Robertson's last appearance with the Band — their *Last Waltz* farewell concert, which took place Thanksgiving Day 1977 at San Francisco's Winterland Ballroom — it takes them all back to their roots backing rockabilly wild man Ronnie Hawkins. You can hear the band's chemistry and in-sync playing following the singer's every move as he rips through the Bo Diddley classic. While it doesn't feature Roberton's most original or impressive playing and, of course, he didn't write the song, you can't understand his whole career unless you grasp this cornerstone. As much as he became renowned for his songwriting and sharp-edged but pithy playing, he started his career as a burning-hot teen prodigy, joining Hawkins' ace band when he was just 16.

That's when Robertson went from Toronto to the Mississippi Delta with Hawkins; he quickly immersed himself in the region's musical history, starting at a Memphis record store. The city, he said, was "the musical center of the universe," and Robertson spent every spare dime on records, immersing himself in the guitar work of Hubert Sumlin with Howlin' Wolf, as well as Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson and B.B. King. "Hearing their great vibratos made me determined to figure out how to do that," Robertson said. This recording is a window into that development.

"Like a Rolling Stone"

Bob Dylan

Bootleg Series, Vol. 4, Bob Dylan Live 1966

When considering Robertson's greatest moments, it's hard to overlook his days backing Bob Dylan on the latter's 1966 tour, playing ripping leads as fans screamed "Judas," outraged by Dylan's shift from solo acoustic artist to leading a ripping, rocking band. You can hear the chemistry the Band already possessed, and you can feel the defiance that the whole group seems to be taking along with Dylan in standing their ground in the face of aggressive opposition.

"It was a deep education on the magic of music and life," Robertson said. "You couldn't have written a more amazing story, and that forged the Band. The shit we went through was incredible. Hooking up with Bob Dylan was like entering *The Twilight Zone* of music. You thought, 'They're going to wake me up tomorrow because all of this is impossible.'"

"The Weight"

The Band

Music from Big Pink, 1968

"The Weight" is probably the song that Robertson will always be best known for. His career after the Band was largely focused on his work scoring movies, particularly for Martin Scorsese; we have Robertson to thank for the amazing *Goodfellas* montage, which uses Derek and the Dominos' "Layla" to such stunning effect. But movies informed his art and inspired his writing from the beginning, and "The Weight" plays out like a vivid, impressionistic slice of modernist filmmaking.

"I became a movie bug when I was quite young," he said. "Even at eight years old, I remember going to see movies and just living inside them. It just touched a nerve deep inside me." Later, living in New York City and starting to really explore songwriting, he discovered the scripts of great filmmakers including Akira Kurosawa, Howard Hawks, John Ford and Orson Welles, and reading them was life-changing. "They revealed something to me that was very valuable and inspired me to write the stories in songs," he said.

"The Weight" comes into focus when you think of it that way. The live version from *The Last Waltz* featuring the Staple Singers is also excellent and could easily be subbed in here, but the original was a bedrock of the group's approach and sound.

"King Harvest Has Surely Come"

The Band

The Band, 1969

"King Harvest (Has Surely Come)" is the last track on the Band's second album, and it's a stunning composition on all fronts, a funky tune that's also a cautionary tale about a farmer praying for a good harvest that will pull him out of a downward spiral. He's battling bad weather and a union boss who doesn't exactly seem to have his back. The music is similarly complex, moving through different

[*from left*] Robertson in his recording studio in 1987; at a 1969 photo shoot in Saugerties, New York; with Bob Dylan at Philadelphia's Academy of Music in 1966

FROM LEFT: GEORGE ROSE/GETTY IMAGES DAVID ATTIE/GETTY IMAGES CHARLIE STEINER/HIGHWAY 67/GETTY IMAGES

sections and vocalists without ever losing its pulsating groove. It's a testament to the group's vitality, and a prime example of why the other members became disenchanted that their contributions weren't recognized with songwriting credits; the group collaboration seems evident. Throughout the whole song, Robertson's playing is magnetic, compelling and pungent.

"I always try to figure out what to play on this song, and it never comes out right," Haynes says. "I've heard a bunch of versions and he plays something different on all of them, which is fascinating. There's a great outtake where his playing is completely different than what's on the album. It's cool to hear them evolve or just change completely, but the album version stands out."

"Up On Cripple Creek"

The Band

The Band, 1969

"Up On Cripple Creek" is another Robertson song that sounds like it's been around forever, and it combines elements of virtually every American musical genre. "When you dig into the guitar parts of 'Cripple Creek,' they are different from what you expect," Haynes says. There's a reason this is the first full song on *The Last Waltz*. It swings out of the gate and never slows down.

"The Shape I'm In"

The Band

Rock of Ages, 1972

The lyrics of "The Shape I'm In," off the Band's third album, *Stage Fright*, expressed a sentiment that was more heartfelt and personal to Robertson than anyone realized at the time. He was tiring of life on the road and casting a wary eye toward the abuse that was starting to weigh down the group — the shape they were in was increasingly alarming. The live album *Rock of Ages* captures a spectacular show at NYC's Academy of Music on New Year's Eve 1971, with a terrific horn section arranged by New Orleans master Allen Touissant. It was in many ways a capstone on the first era of the Band and a preview of *The Last Waltz*.

"Acadian Driftwood"

The Band

Northern Lights, Southern Cross, 1975

"Acadian Driftwood" tells the story of the French-Canadians' exile and how they made their way south to Louisiana to become Cajuns. It's another achingly beautiful song, lyrically and musically, this time driven by Robertson's acoustic guitar.

"He's playing open chords with a capo, and that's what makes that song work," Haynes says. "If you try to learn it without the capo, the parts don't make nearly as much sense."

"It Makes No Difference"

The Band

The Last Waltz, 1978

"It Makes No Difference" is one of the most beautiful, emotional, aching songs in the Band canon, and it really comes alive on stage, particularly the excellent version from *The Last Waltz*. It is also a great example of how Robertson's guitar parts are a perfect echo of the mournful lyrics and bassist Rick Danko's heartfelt, passionate singing, an all-time great vocal performance, with his voice cracking and straining in all the right ways and places to emphasize the song's emotional depth.

"Robbie's playing has this melancholy thing about it that perfectly reflects the song's themes and feel," Haynes says. "And the intro is perfect. It sounds relatively simple, but I realized I was playing it wrong. I don't want to mimic everything, but that part is essential to the song sounding right, and he plays a harmony part, where one note goes up and one note goes down. It's a diad, but instead of playing the same inversion twice, he switches it with the part in harmony, and it makes total sense once you realize what he's doing."

"Further On Up the Road"

The Band, feat. Eric Clapton

The Last Waltz, 1978

Hey, this is *Guitar World*! No one else would include the Band's romp through this Bobby "Blue" Bland gem to be one of their essential tracks, but it's so enlightening and just fun to hear Robertson stand toe to toe with Eric Clapton and rip smoking-hot blues leads. Haynes says he "never even thought of comparing Robertson to another guitarist" — he's just too singular — but he and Clapton clearly share roots, and there are many alternate paths Robertson could have taken that would have more fully explored his guitar hero roots. This performance offers one glimpse of that.

"Ghost Dance"

Robbie Robertson

Music for the Native Americans, 1994

Robertson directly addressed his Mohawk and Cayuga heritage on this 1994 solo album, recorded with native musicians the Red Road Ensemble for a documentary called *The Native Americans*. "Ghost Dance" is a highlight that goes right at the theme of maintaining tradition and integrity in the face of violence. "They outlawed the Ghost Dance / But we shall live again." Robertson grew up in part on a reservation outside of Toronto, and he told me in 2019 that it was where his musical awakening happened. "I got introduced to music on a real level on the reservation, and it was part of that culture and heritage," he said. "Everybody played music, and I needed to be in the club." GW

Misha Mansoor of Periphery plays the American Series Virtuoso in Satin Shell Pink

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Omar Rodríguez-López (and his pedalboard) in action in Seattle, June 8, 2016

MAT HAYWARD/GETTY IMAGES

MARS ATTACKS

In 2006, *Guitar World* called the MARS VOLTA's **OMAR RODRÍGUEZ-LÓPEZ** one of "the new guitar gods" — not that he sought out, understood (or even agreed with) the accolades. Now that we've had 17 years to think about it, we can safely present **10 blazing Mars Volta** moments that prove our point. (And Omar, you'll just have to sit there and take it!) By Ryan Reed

BACK IN 2006, Omar Rodríguez-López was a towering, Jimi Hendrix-like figure within the world of modern progressive rock. *Guitar World* dubbed him one of "The New Guitar Gods," and he joined a jaw-dropping murderers' row — Buddy Guy, B.B. King, Eddie Van Halen, Kirk Hammett and John Mayer — for *Rolling Stone*'s "Guitar Heroes" cover story.

Despite these accolades, the Mars Volta bandleader wasn't convinced of his own merit on the instrument: "I've never considered myself a guitarist, and I've never liked the guitar," he told us. "I feel like an imposter in a really beautiful, magical place," he admitted to *Rolling Stone* during a photo shoot for the aforementioned interview. "And I feel like any minute somebody's gonna go, 'That guy!' and I'm gonna have to leave."

He's managed to stick around, of course — racking up piles of dazzling arpeggios and hurricane wah-wah solos as part of the Volta, the reformed post-hardcore act At the Drive-In and his numerous, genre-spanning side and solo projects. There's an intriguing disconnect between his perception and the public's: he's an icon in front of an amp, like it or not. But while Rodríguez-López sells himself short as a technician, it's fitting that he feels out of place next to virtuosos like Van Halen or traditionalists like King. He's always been a composer who just happened to pick up an ax; he wields guitars like paintbrushes — practical tools for flinging color on a canvas. (It's telling that his first signature guitar, the Ibanez ORM-1, was

about as un-fussy as you can get: one pickup, one knob.)

On the Mars Volta's early records, Rodríguez-López used effects (delays, phasers, choruses and virtually everything else) as rocket fuel to visit strange new worlds. "I mean, how old is the guitar?" he mused to *Guitar World* in 2012. "And there are only 12 notes you can play on it! When you think of it that way, it's like, in terms of the guitar as a device, what else does technology offer? So you go into the gear, the pedals, the plug-ins and anything else that has been invented."

Volta's relentlessly experimental songs, crafted with singer/lyricist/creative partner Cedric Bixler-Zavala, continue the lineage of edgy guitar tinkerers like Frank Zappa and Robert Fripp — but the band has never lapsed into nostalgia. Instead, *De-Loused in the Comatorium* (2003) and *Frances the Mute* (2005) were genuinely new and vibrant in a way prog hadn't been since the era of Peter Gabriel's fox costume — pairing punk energy with Latin groove, metallic ferociousness and jazz-fusion chops. They needed world-class players to pull it off — original drummer Jon Theodore, who plays with the legitimate bombast of John Bonham, left an intimidating pedal-print during his tenure of one EP and three albums. But it's no coincidence that the Volta's most transcendent moments happen to spotlight the guitar.

And as the playing style evolves, so does the band's music, from the frantic, overstuffed spectacle of 2008's *The Bedlam in Goliath* through the more minimalist path of their latest LP, the 2022 art-pop switch-up *The Mars Volta* (a completely acoustic version of which, titled *Que Dios Te Maldiga Mi Corazon,* was released earlier this year). While Rodríguez-López probably wouldn't approve of us spilling so many words, the breadth of his guitar work deserves the regality of an old-fashioned top 10 list.

In our Holiday 2022 issue, we named Rodríguez-López (shown here in March 2008) one of the 30 greatest Texas guitarists of all time

10. "The Requisition"

(from 2022's The Mars Volta)

The Mars Volta's self-titled LP may frustrate fans who crave nothing but gargantuan phaser solos and tricky time signatures; it's slicker and more hook-oriented than any of their previous six albums, with Rodríguez-López exercising admirable restraint in his quest for reinvention. But you'll still find plenty of choice riffs on this self-described "pop" project — they're just more subtle, typically supporting the vocals and blending into the bigger sonic tapestry. The most obvious "guitar song" here is pseudo-epic closer, "The Requisition," one of only two tracks to run past the four-minute mark. Rodríguez-López keeps his parts pared down for the verses, picking a clean two-chord pattern with occasional sun-ray overdubs. But the vibe turns more sinister from there; the processed drums lift us into a more traditional rock setting, and the guitars snarl and spasm with distortion and wah. The dissonances and spindly fills even flirt with the menace he utilized so brilliantly throughout *De-Loused in the Comatorium* — but in keeping with *The Mars Volta*'s broader aesthetic, the context feels fresh. It's possible that some jaded diehards might not give "The Requisition" a fair shake. Their loss! "Losing 'fans' is baked into what we do," Rodríguez-López told *The Guardian* in 2022. "I don't know a greater happiness than losing 'fans.' A true fan is someone interested in what's happening now, and then there's everyone else trying to control what you do or project onto it."

9. "Cavalettas"

(from 2008's The Bedlam in Goliath)

"There are a lot of things I see going on in the world and lots of things I read about that make me very angry," Rodríguez-López told *Guitar Player* in 2012. "I try to channel that anger into creative energy rather than pound my fist against the wall or another human being's head." Nonetheless, some of the Mars Volta's most impactful music — particularly the heaviest moments of their fourth LP, *The Bedlam in Goliath* — is downright violent, approximating the force of being blindsided in the jaw with a nail-covered 2-by-4. The appropriately titled *Bedlam* is the apex of the band's naked aggression and sonic mayhem, piled to the brim with limb-flailing drum fills, harsh vocal effects and ungodly guitar noise. At its most bombastic, like "Cavalettas," it's all

a savory headache, teetering on the border of nervous agitation and sugar-rush excitement. It's... a lot. The song's opening seconds offer a roadmap: A shrieking guitar fades in from nothingness, leading to a jolt of superhuman snare rolls and distorted prog convulsions. Bixler-Zavala sprays out Dali-like surrealism over the din ("Primordial cymatics giving birth into reverse / Serrated mare ephemera undo her mother's curse"), now several tracks deep into a lyrical concept that may or may not involve a cursed ouija board. Here Rodriguez-López is part of a brutal prog orchestra ducking out occasionally to make room for a scurrying fusion saxophone lick or brooding piano chords. But when he takes the spotlight, he isn't shy — just dig into those chunky funk-punk chords that first swoop in around 1:29 or the creepy-crawly, Zappa-tinted solo around the four-minute mark.

by Rodríguez-López's guitar. Then, by song's end, the engine is revved back up once more: The final 30 seconds find Bixler-Zavala channeling musical theater levels of drama over a pile-driving rhythm, asking repeatedly, "Who brought me here?" over six-string shrapnel.

7. "Cicatriz ESP"

(from 2003's De-Loused in the Comatorium)

The opening and climactic riff is disarming, alternating between bruising two-note groupings over a hypnotic drum pattern. These sections reach a sort of classic rock clarity: (relatively) minimal effects, pared-back arrangement, 4/4 instead of a difficult-to-count time signature. But elsewhere, "Cicatriz ESP" breaks loose from the restraints and goes gloriously full prog. Around four minutes deep, the vibe shifts toward the atmospheric, with Rodríguez-López and John Frusciante

Búfalo. (Most of the Mars Volta's then-lineup appear on that earlier cut, including Bixler-Zavala, saxophonist Adrián Terrazas-González, percussionist Marcel Rodríguez-López and bassist Juan Alderete.) It's only appropriate that the revamped, riff-loaded "Goliath," a crucial track within their cursed-ouija concept, is roughly 900 times more volcanic. It's also fitting that they were pressured into chopping up the song up for radio promotion, even if Bixler-Zavala was pissed about it. "[*T*]he end of [*'Goliath'*] is so interesting, we didn't really want it to be used as a single," the singer told MTV. "It kept getting butchered and came off really bad. If you edit our songs and you take away all the extra stuff, then that song might've just sounded like Wolfmother — and we never want to compete with that. They're their own thing, and we're our own thing."

"The guitar solo is just complete expression. It's the closest I can get to a self-portrait, or a portrait of where I was at the time"

8. "Take the Veil Cerpin Taxt"

(from 2003's De-Loused in the Comatorium)

De-Loused in the Comatorium is such a dense, hallucinatory concept album, you need two essential tools to follow along: a thesaurus and a copy of the companion book, which fills in some narrative gaps. (It's impossible to explain the story in a quick blurb, but let's just say it involves suicide, comas and a bewildering dreamworld that makes Genesis' *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* feel childlike in comparison.) An eruption of molten lava after the tranquil ocean waves of acoustic ballad "Televators," closer "Take the Veil Cerpin Taxt" cranks the intensity to a 20 out of 10, both lyrically and sonically. Like many of the album's heaviest bits, the main riff here is like At the Drive-In meets *Red*-era King Crimson: rabid and snarling, but with a harmonic richness that raises an eyebrow and leaves you a bit disoriented, like you're roaming around the Comatorium yourself. (Around the 3:40 mark is a bizarre, liquid-like run that segues into a satisfyingly scrambled squelch.) It's a giddy rush trying to process all of these shifts in timbre and tone, and the noise hits harder when balanced out with groove. About five minutes deep, Flea (on loan here from future Mars Volta tour mates the Red Hot Chili Peppers) digs into a ridiculously funky bass riff — one punctured with icicle sharpness

(also on loan from the Chili Peppers) trading acid-friendly runs. It's a joy to hear the bandleader play with such an enormous canvas, channeling the more expansive jams Volta have so often chased onstage. ("For all the time I spend with the architecture of the music, the guitar solo is just complete expression," Rodríguez-López told *Guitar World* in 2006. "It's the closest I can get to a self-portrait, or a portrait of where I was at the time.") By the time the 12-minute song reaches its Latin-flavored climax, we've reached pure guitar euphoria.

6. "Goliath"

(from 2008's The Bedlam in Goliath)

The Mars Volta rarely swagger in the traditional sense. But when they do, their swaggering shakes the sidewalks: "Goliath" might be the closest thing to horns-up hard rock in their catalog, even if the bluesy main lick is unfurled in a tricky 17/4 time signature and the groove shifts into a gentle Latin feel halfway through. This seven-minute behemoth is an obvious centerpiece of the band's wild fourth LP, *The Bedlam in Goliath*, maneuvering seamlessly through several dynamic shifts. It feels lived-in, and for good reason: Rodríguez-López first recorded a slower, funkier version for his 2007 solo record *Se Dice Bisonte, No*

5. "Cassandra Gemini"

(from 2005's Frances the Mute)

Within the context of 2000s rock music, the Mars Volta's mind-melting debut was like a transmission from an alien planet. But *De-Loused* — produced by Rick Rubin, an industry legend who's rarely ventured into prog, before or since — was almost earthy compared to the glorious indulgence of their 2005 follow-up, *Frances the Mute*. The record's first half has glimpses of relative accessibility, including the eternal power-ballad "The Widow." But Rodríguez-López pushed the band into another realm of cinematic splendor with "Cassandra Gemini," a 32-minute epic more exhaustive — and exhausting — than anything else in the prog canon. There are too many riffs to count, as the maestro veers giddily from distorted, paint-peeling bends to squealing wah to palm-muted blues variations to spindly melodies to impressionistic effects that somehow sound like solar flares and laser beams. But not one second of this insanity feels wasted, or even showoff-y — the guitars are always weaved into an ensemble framework. (Alderete and Theodore add the muscle; keyboardist Ikey Owens brings his own graceful fireworks on various keyboards; a full-blown orchestra makes a memorable cameo; and there's enough space for Terrazas-González on his silky jazz flute and sax shredding.) It's a masterpiece.

PAUL BERGEN/REDFERNS

Rodríguez-López (and his giganto pedalboard) on stage during Bonnaroo 2009 in Manchester, Tennessee. "Losing 'fans' is baked into what we do," he told *The Guardian* in 2022

JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC

4. "Viscera Eyes"

(from 2006's Amputechture)

It's rare for two famous musicians to mesh without clashing egos or industry meddling, but Rodríguez-López developed a beautifully organic bond with Frusciante. The duo first met in the early 2000s — the Volta leader didn't even know his new friend was famous — and started playing together casually. And that chemistry eventually carried over into the recording studio: Frusciante first cranked out some guitar and synth on "Cicatriz ESP," then added a pair of scorching solos to *Frances the Mute*'s "L'Via L'Viaquez," but he took on a more substantive role on 2006's *Amputechture*, tracking the bulk of guitar parts so the latter could focus on being an objective producer. "He came in and was literally the guitar player for the album," Rodríguez-López told *Guitar World*. "I'm just playing all the guitar solos and parts that needed to be doubled. He said he had fun just coming in, playing his parts and being part of an eight-piece band without having to take on all the songwriting and producing roles that he has with the Chili Peppers. John's a true guitar player. He makes it look so simple. I just spend most of my time wrestling with it." It's fun listening to a song like "Viscera Eyes," the most accessible moment on Mars Volta's third LP, and pondering the pair's six-string partnership — during the solo section, with an overdriven lead line splayed out over meaty power chords, we're probably hearing them both at once. They achieve some tasty tones at various places: With the guitars meshed into the fabric of Terrazas-González's soaring saxophone and Owens' keys, it all hits like one staggering block of sound.

3. "Eriatarka"

(from 2003's De-Loused in the Comatorium)

Aggressive triplet chords kick off *De-Loused*'s emotional anchor, and they appear throughout in the choruses, paired with some of Theodore's most intricate, bombastic drumming. The Mars Volta never truly shed their flair for post-hardcore, but when it taps that vein, "Eriatarka" sounds like a progged-out cousin of At the Drive-In's final LP, *Relationship of Command*. Few guitarists can navigate this primal terrain with such color and charisma, but the grand-slams of this song arrive in the softer spaces: On the verses, Rodríguez-López voyages into the psychedelic, layering on blissful effects and exploring seemingly every permutation of his delicate riff through hammer-ons and rhythmic variations. The most surprising moment is the brief shift into echoing dub at 4:04 — he just couldn't resist! (It's worth noting that, prior to forming the Mars Volta, four of the band's then-members — Rodríguez-López, Bixler-Zavala, Owens and effects operator Jeremy Ward — played in a lesser-known dub group named De Facto. Everything comes full-circle.)

2. "Tetragrammaton"

(from 2006's Amputechture)

Bixler-Zavala left behind long-form concepts — at least briefly — with the Mars Volta's third LP. But that didn't stop him from exploring some deranged ideas, like the story of (possible) demonic possession at the core of 16-minute epic "Tetragrammaton." (Not that you need a concrete narrative to enjoy the imagery: "Glossolalia coats my skin / Glycerin and turbulence," he belts on the impossibly high chorus. "Stuffed the voice inside of God / Mirrors to the animals.") Even if the frontman is on fire here, this piece also could have worked as an instrumental — it's dominated start to finish by the hyperactive guitar work (composed by Rodríguez-López, played largely by Frusciante): the dizzying verse arpeggios and chromatic leads, the jagged staccato stabs on the chorus, the late-song surge of wah, the processed goo that stretches out like taffy during the ambient bridge. By this point in his career, the composer had even started to embrace the guitar instead of fighting against it: "I was feeling more comfortable with it and just wanting to play it as a traditional instrument," he told *Guitar World*, "to see if I was capable of doing that. This record probably has the least amount of effects on the guitar of anything I've ever recorded. The instrument is actually recognizable as a guitar." Mind you, nothing about "Tetragrammaton" is "traditional," but we take his point — he never sounded more natural flexing his muscles.

1. "Cygnus... Vismund Cygnus"

(from 2005's Frances the Mute)

The song opens so quietly, so blanketed in top-end, that, back in 2005, you probably thought FYE sold you a defective copy — or that maybe your six-disc changer was on the fritz. Rodríguez-López strums a ghostly acoustic progression, as Bixler-Zavala croons imagery worthy of an avant-garde thriller film ("The ocean floor is hidden from your viewing lens / A depth perception languished in the night / All my life, I've been sewing the wounds / But the seeds sprout a lachrymal cloud"). And then, a marvel of modern production: Just as you've blasted the volume to compensate for the softness, the band pummels you at full power, launching into a percussive Latin funk-prog groove led by Rodriguez-López's palm-muted squeals and ping-ponging overdubs. "Cygnus" is defined by these extreme dynamics: At 4:14, after a confetti blast of effects, Alderete and Theodore settle into a deep, reflective groove, with the guitars shifting into all sorts of strange shapes in the foreground. The tension slowly builds, the tones lurching and short-circuiting, and we build to another plane with Bixler-Zavala back on the mic. Then we drop out and build back, tracing that arc all over again — a perfectly manic symmetry. GW

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Joe Perry — with [*from left*] Brad Whitford, Steven Tyler and Joey Kramer in the background — struts his Les Paul across the stage at London's Wembley Arena, June 15, 1997

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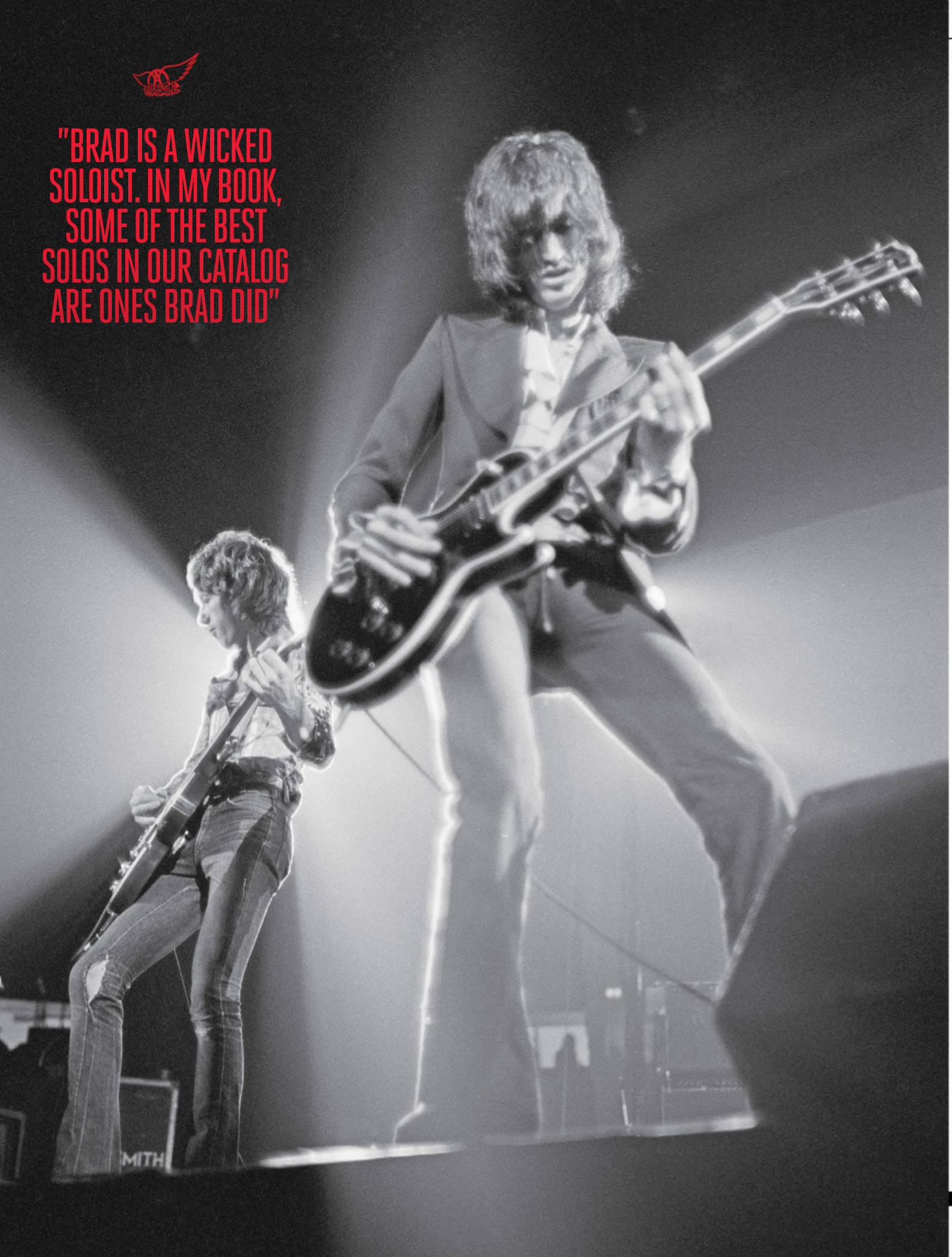
THE FIRST 50 YEARS

PART 1

On the eve of what might be Aerosmith's *actual* permanent vacation, **JOE PERRY** walks us through his five decades (give or take a few years in the early '80s) as a member of "America's Greatest Rock and Roll Band" — the ruts, the riffs, the solos, the gear, the tones, the breakup, the reunion and so much more. BY ANDREW DALY

BRIAN RASIC/GETTY IMAGES


"BRAD IS A WICKED SOLOIST. IN MY BOOK, SOME OF THE BEST SOLOS IN OUR CATALOG ARE ONES BRAD DID"

JOE PERRY HAS STILL GOT IT. THAT

much is true. Considering he's 73, you'd think he'd be slowing down, but here's the thing — he's not. Perry is as nimble-fingered as ever. And as I prepare to settle in for what amounted to a two-hour call with the veteran gunslinger, it becomes apparent that Perry is not only nimble but busy, too.

"I've been running around all week getting ready for the [*Hollywood*] Vampires tour," Perry says. "It's been crazy. It blows my fucking mind how busy we've been. When we started, I never expected to be this busy, but it's been great. I've got all my guitars loaded up, and we're ready to go."

Indeed, those 73-year-old hands still traverse the fretboard of his array of well-loved Fenders and Gibsons with tenderness and ease. Anyone who has seen Perry live lately will tell you that his swagger remains, only to be matched by an unmistakable tone that — for 50-plus years — has defined America's greatest rock band, Aerosmith.

And what of that tone? What's more, what of the notion that Aerosmith — which after 50 years of breakups, shake-ups and extended pauses, is still composed of Steven Tyler, Brad Whitford, Tom Hamilton, Joey Kramer and Perry — is America's greatest rock band? Cutting to the chase, despite what some will say, Aerosmith *is* America's greatest rock band.

As for Perry's tone, boy, it's sweeter and sleazier than ever. Of course, gone are the drugs, drinks and drama, but make no mistake, Perry can still summon the ravenous ghost of his stage-struttin' past with ease. Now unencumbered and staring at the end of Aerosmith's road down, like an outlaw would the barrel of a gun, there's nothing left to prove. For Perry, though, the end doesn't mean complacency. What he's built is too important for that. And so it's not over until he says it is. He'll show up and burn it down like he always has. And it's that same fire that leads Perry to sling his trusty "Burned Strat" over his shoulder, whip his grayed and frayed hair back, take a breath and swagger with utter confidence while wailing away at the riffs and solos that made him a legend.

Perry has seen it all — sometimes (but not anymore) through a hazy lens of too many illicit substances. And there's an argument to be made that he's forgotten more than he remembers. Not that Perry harbors many regrets when he thinks back, saying, "It's too hard to pick any one thing, you know? But I guess, maybe if I didn't drink the whole decade of the Seventies away, things would have been different. But beyond that, I'm proud of what we've done; there are no major regrets."

The ugliest side of the music business saw Perry fall into a pit of his own making, only for him to climb out and dominate with more turbo-charged machismo than before. No, he was never the fastest gun in the game, nor was the technical side his bag. But Perry didn't need to be; no one can take that from him. Nor could they endeavor to be him. He's that original.

Whitford [*left*] and Perry in Providence, Rhode Island, October 27, 1975. "Brad went to Berklee, so he's got all that music theory stuff to draw upon," Perry says

Still, when he thinks back on his origins, Perry, as is his trademark, remains soft-spoken and dutifully humble, "I really didn't have a lot of guitar players around me growing up. I didn't grow up in a musical family, and I didn't come from a town with all these hot guitar players. I didn't have many examples, which is probably why I play right-handed even though I'm left-handed. I didn't know there was such a thing as a left-handed guitar until much later. It wasn't until I got going with the guys and we moved to Boston that we started to hear other bands and stuff. That's when I began picking up a few things along the way."

In a world where sameness has become the standard, Perry chooses to stand out even at 73. Maybe it's because that fire still burns, or perhaps he's never done it any other way but his own. Regardless, when Perry hits the stage, all eyes are on him. And considering he's shared that stage with Steven Tyler for 50 years, that's saying something.

"Steven and I are the type of guys who like to run through the woods with BB guns," Perry says with a laugh. "And for all the ups and downs when we were away from the band, Steven and I have always been just like brothers. We've had so many adventures together, like SCUBA diving in Maui, where we went down to see a shipwreck. And when we were out playing Vegas, we went out into the desert and paraglided with a parachute. I still love the guy like a brother. We're closer than ever, and I'm not just saying that, either. It's true."

Relationships and resurgences aside, Perry *is* facing the end of a long road with Aerosmith. But that's alright because, for now, he's *still* got it. When you think of a quintessential rock guitarist, a few players come up, but there's more than a puncher's chance that one of, if not the first name that springs to mind, is Joe Perry.

Thinking on the significance of Aerosmith's final tour — and if this is truly it for the band — Perry says, "I really do think it is it. If you look at how old we are, the fact that we can still go out and play as a band is pretty remarkable. It's sad that Joey [*Kramer*] can't go out; he's given everything he has to give physically, but the rest of us can still do it [*Back in May, Aerosmith released the following statement: "While Joey Kramer remains a beloved founding member of Aerosmith, he has regret-*

FIN COSTELLO/REDERNS

I DON'T WANT TO MISS A THING

SELECTED HIGHS, LOWS AND IN-BETWEENS OF AEROSMITH'S STORIED CAREER

BY ANDREW DALY

1970

Aerosmith form in Boston when Joe Perry, Joey Kramer and Tom Hamilton's Jam Band play the same venue as (drummer) Steven Tyler's Chain Reaction. Tyler insists he'll join — but only if he's allowed to sing.

...1970...

Tyler's childhood friend Raymond Tabano is hired as a second guitarist, playing his first gig November 6 at Nipmuc Regional High School in Mendon, Massachusetts.

1971

Berklee School of Music attendee Brad Whitford replaces Tabano.

1972

Aerosmith sign a management contract with David Krebs and Steve Leber, who pitch the group to major labels.

...1972...

Krebs and Leber invite Columbia Records' Clive Davis to see the band at Max's Kansas City in NYC. Aerosmith sign with Columbia for $125,000.

1973

Aerosmith release their self-titled debut album in January. Tracks include "Dream On" and "Mama Kin."

1974

Get Your Wings is recorded with producer Jack Douglas. Session aces Steve Hunter and Dick Wagner are called in to lend a hand on "Train Kept A-Rollin'."

1975

Toys in the Attic — featuring "Walk This Way" and "Sweet Emotion" — is released.

1976

Rocks follows *Toys in the Attic* and goes multi-platinum seemingly overnight.

Steven Tyler [*left*] and Perry in action in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1973

tably made the decision to sit out the currently scheduled touring dates to focus his full attention on his family and health."] But we never want to get to the point where we feel like we can't play the way we used to. So yeah, I think this is it.

"I'm just so thankful to the fans because without them we wouldn't still be here. Our career has been a blessing, and sometimes I still can't believe it. When we started, I never imagined we'd be here doing this 50 years later. To have it be the same guys out there together at the end is amazing, and I'm very thankful for that, too."

What was your vision in terms of the guitar sound that's become synonymous with Aerosmith?

When I was growing up, my early years of guitar in terms of sounds that I heard before the British Invasion were shaped by what I heard on pop radio. You had guitars that were fairly clean-sounding and didn't have a lot of heavy tone. But then, when the Beatles came out, guitars became prominent. I could hear the separation of the notes better, which, again, were fairly clean. Then when I was around 14 or 15, I started listening to the Yardbirds, which had a bit more distortion. But there wasn't much that they were doing; it was more that they had some hot amps, a couple of tricks and maybe a foot pedal or two; that was it. It was more about turning the amp up and listening back to the guitar sounds, you know?

So that combination of clean and distorted tones was the basis for you, then?

I'd say so, because Brad [*Whitford*] and I were pretty,

"I WAS PRETTY MUCH USING A STRAT THAT I'D BOUGHT RIGHT OFF THE WALL... I WASN'T THINKING ABOUT WHETHER OLD GUITARS SOUNDED BETTER THAN NEW ONES"

pretty much straight into the amps early on. It just seemed to be the right sound, you know? But I've always been the type of player ready to try something new. And being in a band like Aerosmith, it's about the song and what works right, and then adapting to that. I always liked the guitar to be a little cleaner because I liked being able to hear the tone of the guitar. Hearing the tone was important to me; even if there was some distortion or a little hair on it, I still wanted to hear the difference between a Strat and a Gibson.

What sort of gear were you working with leading up to the recording of the first Aerosmith record in 1973?

Back then, I was pretty much using a Strat that I'd bought right off the wall. The way it was early on was if I needed a guitar, I just went out to a guitar shop and bought one. I wasn't thinking about whether old guitars sounded better than new ones. Even my first Les Paul was brand new; I bought a '68 goldtop reissue right off the wall. But I wasn't hip to what sounded better and this and that. I remember reading about the Beatles talking about their guitar strings, and they didn't care about gauges; they just wanted new strings because they sounded better. They were more about the sound, and that's kinda how I thought about it, too.

Looking at a track like "Mama Kin," how did that approach shape that song's riff?

That riff, in fact, was written by Steven [*Tyler*]. But by that point, Tom [*Hamilton*] and I were really into the English bands; we were listening to a lot of that and

1979

Drugs, drinking and infighting eventually drain the life out of the band. During the recording of *Night in the Ruts*, Perry quits. Jimmy Crespo is hired as his replacement.

1981

After recovering from a motorcycle accident, Tyler and company head to the studio to record *Rock in a Hard Place*. The sessions are a disaster; Whitford quits and is replaced by Rick Dufay.

1983

Now on the road with his Joe Perry Project — just as Whitford's project with Derek St. Holmes is coming to an end — Perry invites Whitford to join the Project, laying the groundwork for...

1984

Perry and Whitford reconcile with Tyler, Hamilton and Kramer. With new management (though not yet sober), Aerosmith embark on the Back in the Saddle Tour.

1985

With their drug problems still afoot but with a successful tour as leverage, Aerosmith sign with Geffen. The band records *Done with Mirrors*.

1986

Band members complete a successful drug rehabilitation, leading to a second wave of success through a crossover hit with Run-DMC on "Walk This Way."

1989

1986's *Permanent Vacation* sends Aerosmith into MTV mode, which they fully embrace with 1989's *Pump*. A 12-month tour follows in support of "Dude (Looks Like a Lady)," "Angel," "Love in an Elevator" and "Janie's Got a Gun."

1990

Aerosmith lay down a stunning performance on MTV's *Unplugged* and appear in a *Wayne's World* sketch on *SNL*. They follow it up in '91 with an appearance on *The Simpsons*.

1992

Perry and Tyler appear as guests

RICHARD MCCAFFREY/ MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/ GETTY IMAGES

alongside Guns N' Roses during their *Pay-Per-View* performance in Paris, rattling off renditions of "Mama Kin" and "Train Kept A-Rollin'."

1998

With the success of 1993's *Get a Grip*, a performance at Woodstock '94 and 1997's *Nine Lives* behind them, Aerosmith record "Don't Wanna Miss a Thing" for *Armageddon*, which stars Steven Tyler's daughter, Liv.

2001

Aerosmith play the Super Bowl XXXV HalfTime Show alongside Britney Spears, Mary J. Blige and Nelly, collaborating on "Walk This Way." *Just Push Play* is released, ushering in a final top-10 single, "Jaded."

2003

Aerosmith hit the road with Kiss for the Rockismus Maximus Tour.

2008

Working alongside Activision, Aerosmith create *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith.* It features a story mode accented by 41 classic Aerosmith cuts.

2010

After renewed feuding over comments made by Tyler in his autobiography, followed by leg surgery and his joining the judge's panel of *American Idol*, Aerosmith reportedly auditions new vocalists to replace Tyler. Tyler issues a "cease and desist," and the troubles subside.

2012

Aerosmith release their latest studio album to date, *Music from Another Dimension*.

2014

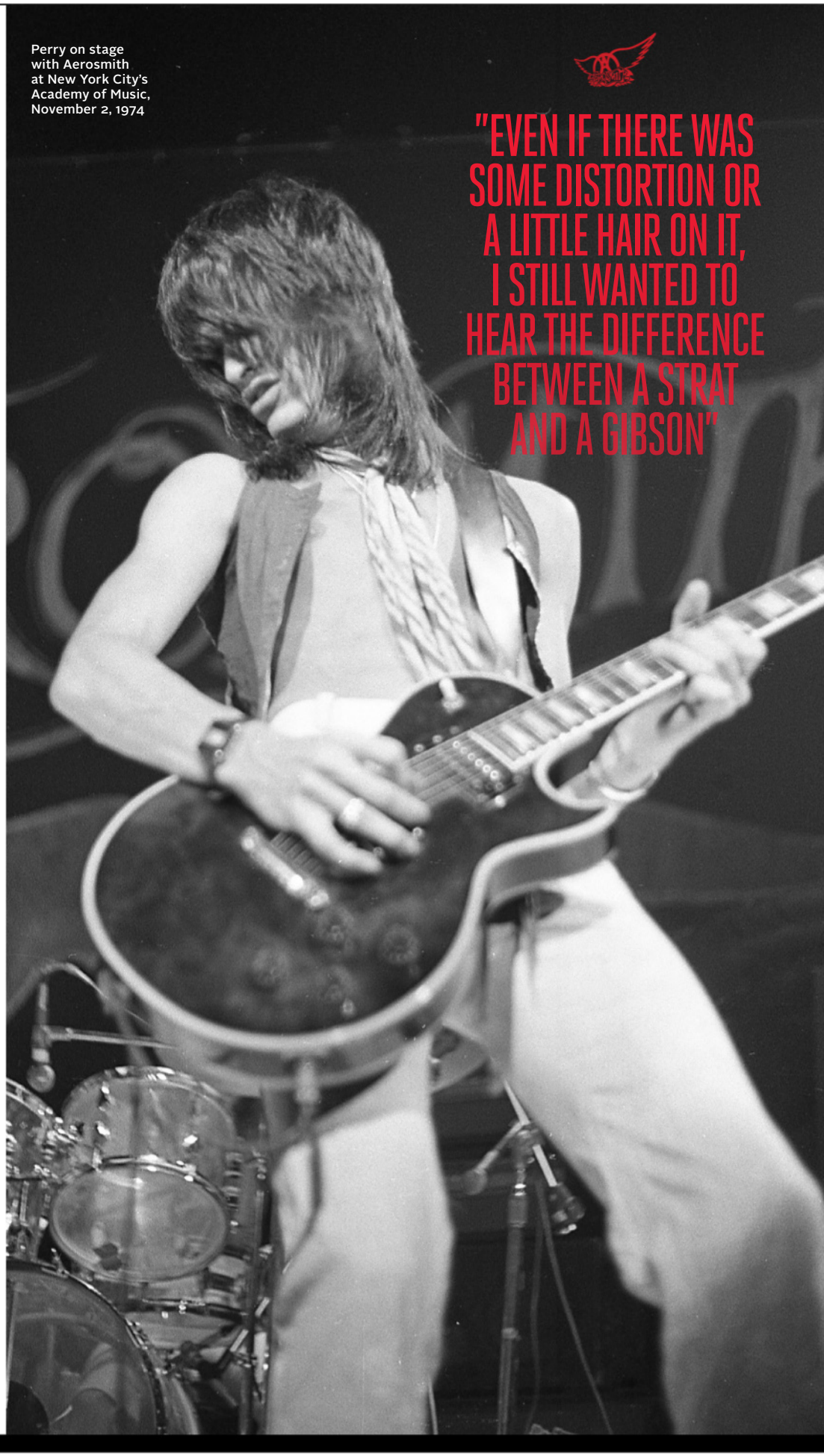
Perry releases his autobiography, *Rocks: My Life in and Out of Aerosmith*.

2016

Tyler puts out a country album, *We're All Somebody from Somewhere*.

2023

Aerosmith announce *Peace Out: The Farewell Tour*, which will stretch over 40 North American dates (with the Black Crowes).



Perry on stage with Aerosmith at New York City's Academy of Music, November 2, 1974

"EVEN IF THERE WAS SOME DISTORTION OR A LITTLE HAIR ON IT, I STILL WANTED TO HEAR THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A STRAT AND A GIBSON"

checking out the guitar tones. And we had played some of it for Steven, who sat down with a guitar — even though he's not a great guitar player — and wrote that riff. So Steven came up with the "Mama Kin" riff, but we immediately took to it.

You mentioned the Strat, but did you still have that '68 goldtop during the recording of Aerosmith's first record?
No, I had actually sold the goldtop by that point. I remember I had a black Strat from '70 or '71 and a '58 Les Paul Junior with a P90 pickup, too, which I got by selling the goldtop. Those were my main guitars for the first record. I really liked the P90; it sounded great with this 50-watt Ampeg I had, which rounded out what I used. I didn't start using Marshalls until the second record, so the Ampeg was probably pretty against the grain for the time. It wasn't the sound I was expecting to get when I went into the studio, but at the time, I didn't know enough to change what I was doing. It ended up sounding great and worked out really well.

How did having more experience inform your approach on 1974's *Get Your Wings*?
The first record was a major learning experience for all of us. But for me, it was like, "Okay, let's get in the studio, and I'll work on getting the guitar sounds I'm looking for along the way." But I learned quickly that you only get out what you put in, meaning whatever you put into the microphone — that's it, baby. So, except for a little reverb, there's no other magic in the studio. And obviously, recording to tape and all the minutiae that goes with that presents challenges, too.

I assume digging deeper into the technical side of it only made you a better player.
It wasn't until the third or fourth record that I began to get into the engineering part of it. I'd go into the studio early and end up staying late with our producer, Jack [*Douglas*], learning what gear did and how that all plays into everything while you're recording. But going back to *Get Your Wings*, my mindset was, "Okay, I gotta get the sound right before I even walk into the studio." That was a change from what I'd done on the first record. So it really was a learning experience, which was important because when we went in to record *Toys in the Attic* [*1975*], we had to write a good three-quarters of that material in the studio.

What necessitated that?
When we signed with Columbia Records, we had a bunch of songs that we'd been playing in clubs, and we recorded most of that on the first two albums. So when we went in to do *Toys in the Attic*, we only had a little bit of that old material left. We wrote some stuff in the studio, which gave us the backbone of maybe five or six good songs. We got pretty comfortable with that process and learned to use the gear to our advantage. That's why our first two records didn't take off; we had to learn about the dynamics of what it takes to make a good record.

How did you come up with the riff for "Walk This Way"?
I was probably using my older sunburst Strat, which was pretty beat up, when I wrote that riff. I remember being at a soundcheck in Hawaii, and I was thinking about the stuff I was listening to, which was a lot of things by the Meters, James Brown and that type of stuff. I loved that stuff because it gave me the feel of where rock music came from, you know? Anyway, we're at soundcheck, and I told Joey [*Kramer*] to lay something down that was kinda like what I was listening to, and I started playing this riff and fleshed it out right there at soundcheck.

Did you know you had a hit right away?
Not immediately, but I liked it. And so, when we brought it to New York during the sessions for *Toys in the Attic*, Steven and I started working on it together. He added some lyrics that fit the melody, along with a little bit of blood and sweat, and it all worked out. That was an interesting song because many of our songs' melodies come from the guitar riffs, but not so much with "Walk This Way."

Did you also use that same sunburst Strat for the "Walk This Way" solo?
Yeah, I did. I distinctly remember just kind of standing there, probably next to either a Fifties, Sixties or early Seventies Marshall — it was so long ago, it's hard to remember — and I came up with the solo. I had some kind of distortion pedal, maybe a [*Maestro*] Fuzz Tone, and I just stood in front of the amp with the Strat and recorded the solo.

These days, you're more associated with Gibsons, but Strats played a significant role early on. Why was that?
I liked the clarity of Strats. But don't get me wrong — I played Gibsons, too; I loved the fat neck and fat frets, and I loved the way they handled. But I always liked having that vibrato, and Strats weren't as high output, so they didn't distort as much when I plugged them right into the amp. I could get a different variety of sounds with a Strat that I couldn't get from a Gibson. But if I wanted to get a bit more crunch, I'd lean on the Gibson. And there are obviously a lot of photos of me playing Gibson stuff, and I love them, but when I go on vacation, I still grab my Strat.

Do they travel better?
It's much easier to take the neck off of a Strat and put it in my suitcase than to travel with a Les Paul. [*Laughs*] And when I get there, I can just screw it back together, and then I have a guitar to play while I'm away. But that aside, like I said, I liked the variety of tones the Strat gave me. I always found myself writing more on a Strat, but there's no doubt I love my Gibsons dearly. I just seem to find myself with a Strat in my hands more often.

Of *Rocks*' 10 songs, you had a hand in five. You seemed to be on fire by that point.
When we were doing *Rocks* [*1976*], like I said before, we came in early, stayed late and often found ourselves in the chair with the producers from beginning to end. We were fascinated with the whole process at that point. Steven is an incredibly talented and detail-oriented guy, and I'm just fascinated by the mechanics of, like, "What does this box or button do?" We were really comfortable in the studio by the time we did *Rocks*. We did the basic tracks at our rehearsal studio in Boston, and we brought a mobile truck up there and had a blast doing it.

Is that where "Rats in the Cellar" was recorded?
Yeah, it was. If you listen to the beginning of the song, it's one of Brad's riffs, and then it's kind of like two guitars doing the same thing. You've got Brad swirling in on the left and me swirling in on the right, and then you hear a door slam in the background. And that was weird, and totally by accident, because there was this guy who was working on the record with us, and he had gone out to get coffee. When he came back, he didn't know we were doing a take, and he ended up slamming the door as he came in. But we liked it, so we left it on. [*Laughs*]

Looking at 1977's *Draw the Line*, I think it has some of your best playing of the Seventies — especially your slide work on "Milk Cow Blues."
When we were young, Tom and I had a garage band back in New

LINDA D. ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES

Hampshire. And the bass player in that band had a brother who went to the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, and he would come home with a bunch of great records, like Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. But he also had this really hard-to-find live record by the Kinks. I remember they did a version of "Milk Cow Blues," where I kinda ripped off the Aerosmith version from. The way they did it was totally different from anywhere else, and that's where I took inspiration from when we were doing *Draw the Line*. They did a cool medley [*with the* Batman *theme and "Tired of Waiting"*], and the guitar was played with a heavy wrist and just sounded so cool. We played it early in the clubs, and so we'd kinda had our version down by the time we did *Draw the Line*.

How did you develop your slide technique?

I don't know... I just kind of had a feel for it. But with "Milk Cow Blues," I remember having the same type of Danelectro guitar that Jimmy Page used [*DC-59*]. It was probably the cheapest guitar I had come across; it had this sticky paper with fake wood grain printed on it and was made from some kind of fiberboard. It had two lipstick pickups and a flat-radius neck, which worked great for playing slide.

Was it Jimmy who inspired you to use the Danelectro?

No, this was actually before I knew Jimmy played one. I just came across it and thought it would work well for slide because of the flat-radius neck. I kept it tuned to open A, open C or even open G. I kept fooling around with it and never really did get into playing it with standard tuning. But the funny thing with the open G tuning, for example, is I found it so hard to write a song that didn't sound like Keith *[Richards*]. But anyway, the Danelectro and the Kinks' version of "Milk Cow Blues" inspired the *Draw the Line* version.

Looking back, did Aerosmith's sudden success negatively impact the band?

It was tough, and by the end of the Seventies, the band wasn't getting along. We certainly had high points, but the other side of it is that Steven and I are known for our legendary fighting and all that shit. But we still went SCUBA diving together and were very close when we were away from the band. We were like brothers outside the band, but when we got into the studio or on the road, we'd butt heads. You have to remember, we were really young small-town guys, so it was interesting to grow into young adulthood with guys you had gotten together with just because you thought they were the right musicians.

How would you describe the state of Aerosmith during the sessions for 1979's *Night in the Ruts*?

The band had issues where sometimes we fought and sometimes we got along. Many problems came when we started having significant others, girlfriends and wives; it was tough. Looking back, we didn't handle it all that well. We just didn't know how to deal with it at the time, you know? It wasn't that we didn't play well together; it was just that we had trouble getting along by that point. I guess that's why it had to end. I split during *Night in the Ruts*; I had to get away.

Do you remember your reasons at the time?

I just had to take care of myself. My personal life wasn't all that great, and I had to deal with that. I had come to terms with that and knew it was time to leave. But I also felt we needed to be more open to new ideas. We were rolling into the Eighties, and I still remember hearing the first Van Halen record and fucking loving it. I mean... what a great fucking record. Eddie's guitar playing was just so incredible; he turned guitar on its fucking ear and was doing stuff that I'd never heard before. I knew it was time for a break because new ideas were needed. But we also needed to re-adjust our sights and learn to get along again. I remember saying, "We're not ready for the Eighties." I don't know why I said that; it was just a vibe or a feeling I had.

Do you regret that in hindsight?

I've always said we would have just taken a break if we had our wits about us. It was probably time to lay low for a bit and reset ourselves, and I guess we did that, but did so in the worst way, which was break up.

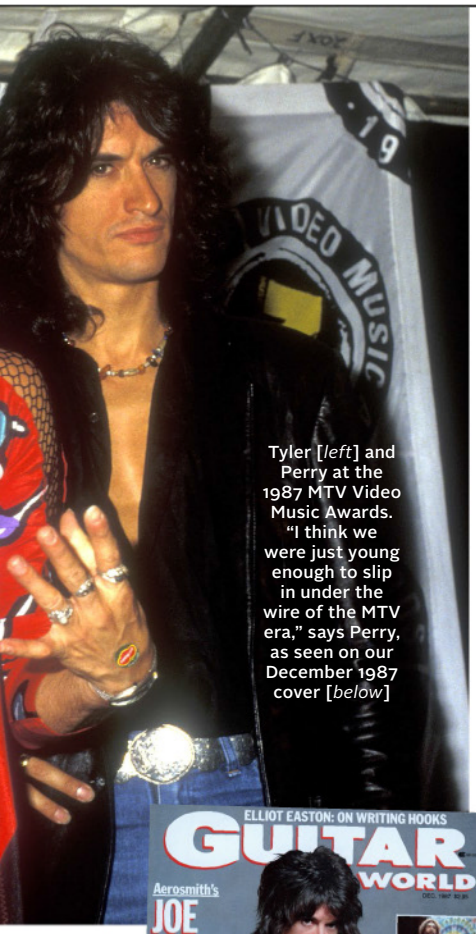
They carried on without me and Brad, but it was a tough time for them, too. But I went out and had a great time with the Joe Perry Project for a few years. I had a great bunch of guys, and we played all over the country. I did some solo records and wrote some great stuff, and maybe some mediocre stuff, too. [*Laughs*] But the main thing was I got out and played and had a good time doing it. But I did miss the guys in Aerosmith during that time.

Did you keep up with Aerosmith while you were away from the band?

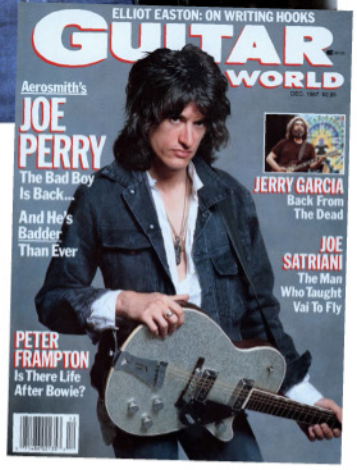
Thinking back on *Night in the Ruts*, that record was a nightmare. But I have to say, it features some of the best playing Aerosmith has ever done in the studio. I remember checking it out after I left, and I was very surprised they left me on it since I left in the middle of it. If you look at a song like "Cheesecake," the slow slide in the middle, we did that live in the studio, and it's so great. I think it could have been a huge record if we had the chance to tour behind it. But it was not to be. And so I want to resurrect some of that stuff and play it live. I can envision doing the back-and-forth thing with Brad at the beginning of "Chiquita"; I think it would go down so well.

Do you feel leaving Aerosmith kept you from going entirely off the rails?

It's hard to look at something like that out of context, you know? Maybe if the circumstances were better, and if I'd stayed, we could have gone on to make another record. But the thing is that maybe if we'd stuck together, something terrible would have happened that would



Tyler [*left*] and Perry at the 1987 MTV Video Music Awards. "I think we were just young enough to slip in under the wire of the MTV era," says Perry, as seen on our December 1987 cover [*below*]



have never been repairable, meaning we would never have gotten back together. Because even though we didn't get along, we had a code of honor in Aerosmith. We never got into fistfights; we never stepped over that line to where we couldn't come back from it. I think we always stopped short of that because deep down, we knew it would be too hard to come back from. So looking back on what led up to that, I think it was the only choice. And now that I think about it, the other thing was that our management was not treating us right, and I couldn't get any support from the other guys.

How so?

I always felt like we were making a lot of fucking money for everybody, and we weren't seeing what we should be seeing. And I couldn't get the other guys in the band to rally, you know? So that was another big part of the issue that I haven't talked much about. But looking back on it, yeah, it was a big part of it for me.

I hadn't heard that side of it, but I can imagine that, given the band's success, that must have been incredibly deflating.

It was. And just to show you just where their heads were at, 10 fucking years after the band got back together, I found out that Columbia Records said, "Oh, he's leaving Aerosmith? Well, we're going to bury his first solo record. We'll starve him back to Aerosmith." I was told that our management at the time didn't think I was that important to Aerosmith. They figured, "Eh, he's just a guitar player, and so is Brad. We'll get two other guys and nobody will care." That shows you how out of touch they were with what Aerosmith was about.

It's bewildering to think Aerosmith's management wouldn't recognize you and Brad's importance.

Yeah, and I always wondered why my solo record didn't do better. It should have done a little better, considering I had been with Aerosmith and was touring across the States, but it didn't. And then, with the second record, I was sure it would do better, and sure enough, they buried it. They wouldn't do anything to push it. It felt good to know that my instincts were right; they just weren't doing their part to help it along.

What ultimately calmed the water between you and Steven to where a reunion was possible?

Before I left Aerosmith, we never dealt with stuff. We'd have these major fucking fights, and rather than dealing with something or sorting it out, we just leave or go in the other room. And I think that time away from each other allowed us to realize how much value there was in us being together in a band. At the end of the Seventies, truthfully, we weren't playing our best; we weren't giving the fans what they were promised. But by '84, we had taken care of a lot of our stuff; well, I don't know how Steven felt about it, but as far as I was concerned, my house was not in order when I left. But I had gotten my personal life in order, which was part of why the band didn't get along prior to it.

How did the reunion actually go down?

It was a combination of things. Like I said, I had sorted out my life and met my wife, Billie, who had to run me through the car wash a few times. [*Laughs*] Meeting her was interesting because she didn't really know Aerosmith; she was into punk rock. She'd heard the name, but it was just another logo or whatever to her. We had this massive career in the Seventies, but she knew maybe two songs. So she was a big part of me sorting my life out. But the other guys still in the band had gone through trying to do Aerosmith without me and Brad, and it's pretty well documented how that went. Even Rick Dufay [*the guitarist who replaced Whitford in 1981*] said, "Listen, you've gotta get those guys back in the band. This just isn't working without them." Rick is a really smart, standup guy who was just telling it like he saw it. But Billie encouraged me to get together with Steven, and we hooked up and talked about Aerosmith, and it went from there.

Would the reunion have happened without Billie?

She put it in perspective for me. When we first got together, we were driving, and "Back in the Saddle" came on the radio. I pulled over and said, "That's my song. Have you ever heard it?" She said, "It sounds familiar," but she really didn't know it. She didn't really understand how big we were in the Seventies, you know? But then she went through some of my old boxes and came across old copies of *Circus* and *Creem* magazines with us on the cover and old pictures of us playing stadiums, and I think that's when it hit home for her. I told her we had gold records, but she didn't understand until she saw the pictures.

Were you surprised she hadn't really heard much of Aerosmith's stuff?

Well, it's not like I walked in saying, "Hey, I'm the guy from Aerosmith," with my Aerosmith T-shirt on. [*Laughs*] It was just a chapter in my life, but it was over at that point. But that's when she said, "Why aren't you guys still together?" I explained the whole thing to her, and we went to see them in Boston when they were doing a gig, and she met Steven, and it all went from there. I could have done another solo record, put another lineup together and toured some more, but we were in a lull, and Aerosmith's other guitar players weren't really working out. So we got back together, but I had one condition: we had to have new management. The rest is history.

You mentioned before that you didn't feel Aerosmith was ready for the Eighties. Did you change your mind after you returned?

When we went in to do *Done with Mirrors* [*1985*], the whole West Coast hair band thing started, and we were trying to find our place. I remember writing those songs and feeling tentative about the whole thing because we didn't know how it would be received. The whole guitar style had changed from British blues to a sound that was very different, very clean sounding and just different

BARRY KING/WIREIMAGE (TYLER/PERRY) FUTURE (GW)

from what we were. We had no idea if we would fit in, and it's not like any of us were ever going to be called "shredders." [*Laughs*]

So there was never a thought of changing who you were?

No; we had no interest in trying to be like the other bands. We were more about dipping our toes in the water, so to speak. And thankfully, [*producer*] Ted Templeman, who we found out later was in awe of the whole thing, came along. We loved what he did with Van Halen and thought he would be a good fit. So with *Done with Mirrors*, he basically just turned the machines on and let us go. And looking back, I kinda wish Ted had more input because I feel that *Done with Mirrors* lacks a layer of production. There was a level of communication that hadn't been established yet, and more spice could have been added to it.

***Done with Mirrors* wasn't a hit, but the Back in the Saddle Tour most certainly was.**

Oh, yeah, we toured in the summer of '84 before we did *Done with Mirrors*. We had been broken up for a few years, were in a new era and went on the road without a record deal. We had to buy our way out of the Columbia Records deal; if you can believe it, we owed them, like, $300,000. After all those records we sold, we owed them money. It was crazy. And we had to get out of the management contract the guys had signed before me and Brad returned. So we had made all this fucking money for all these people, and now we're back together, and we're already in the red. There were no more chartered planes; we were touring on buses with our wives and girlfriends. I can't tell you how thankful we were that the fans came out to support us on that summer tour. We started again in '84 with no album or single; they showed up for us just because they wanted to see us play together again. I'll never forget that, and I don't think we'd be here if they hadn't.

It must have been a real trip rebuilding yourself and the band, finding explosive success again as an older band — who had done it all before — in the heart of the Eighties.

The band in action in Long Island, New York, July 10, 2014

[*right*] Tyler and Perry (with another awesome Les Paul) support *Music from Another Dimension* in Boston in late 2012

The fact that we had been through it before in the Seventies helped. I also think we were just young enough to slip in under the wire of the MTV era. If we had been a few years older, I'm not sure it would have worked. But we were able to get in there with *Permanent Vacation* [*1987*], and we made a video that did great for "Dude (Looks Like a Lady)." But that was all new to us, you know? The idea of a TV station that played music videos 24/7 was very different from what we did in the Seventies when we only made videos for promotion and played them at trade shows and shit. Defining a song with a video was very new, and putting a picture in people's minds like that wasn't something we were sure about, but it was fun. We ended up having a great time with the whole MTV thing. Some of the videos for the songs were literal translations of the lyrics, and others were just eye candy and a bunch of fun stuff to watch. [*Laughs*]

Speaking of "Dude (Looks Like a Lady)," your tone on the solo always struck me as unique. What guitar did you use?

I used a Gretsch Duo Jet sparkle. I used that, and I probably had .10-gauge strings on it. I really wanted to get a lot of bite on the solo, but I also wanted it to fit the song. That song isn't one of our favorites, but we had a sense of humor about it, and the fans really love it. So it's always in the setlist. But that song was cool because I could pick and choose the guitar tones that I got on it. Another one like that was "Janie's Got a Gun."

The solo for "Janie's Got a Gun" features the same twang. Did you use the Gretsch Duo Jet?

No, that came about differently than "Dude (Looks Like a Lady)." With "Janie's Got a Gun," I wanted something angry sounding. I had this Chet Atkins semi-acoustic guitar with a single cutaway and strings that were on the heavier side. It was a Gibson that was only like two inches thick and had a piezo pickup in it. I plugged it into one of those 15-watt Marshall practice amps, turned it all the way up and played it in front of the producer, Bruce [*Fairbairn*], who hated it. He said, "That sounds terrible; it's just not gonna work." And, I mean, it was pretty raunchy, and we were dealing with all sorts of feedback and shit. But I said, "No, let me give it a try," and I got this nasty sound that raged coming out. It worked, and in fact, when I was

touring, I used that exact same setup for the song.

"Love in an Elevator" was huge too. I believe Brad took the first solo and you played the second one, right?

Yeah; it just felt like a good place to do that. We've always kinda shifted back and forth where maybe Brad takes the first part, I take the second, he takes the third and I take the fourth. That's basically what we did on "Love in an Elevator." And then, during the breakdown, that's me playing. But it's always rubbed me the wrong way when people put Brad down and only refer to me as the lead guitarist. We're both guitar players in the band, you know? Brad is a wicked soloist. In my book, some of the best solos in our catalog are ones Brad did.

That's a good point. One of the great things about you and Brad as a guitar duo is that there's no ego.

Brad is a great guitarist; he really is. I don't have any schooling, but Brad went to Berklee, so he's got all that music theory stuff to draw upon. He's always been great at watching me and adding something that would fit in there well. But we never really talked about who would play what. It was more about who would play a Strat and who would play a Gibson because we wanted to have two different guitar sounds in there. And like I said before, most of the time, when I was writing, it would be on a Strat. But Brad was more of a Gibson guy. We wanted to dial in those tones to where they worked together because we were never into having two guitars that sounded the same. In my mind, we could be like the Yardbirds in those rare times when you had Jimmy [*Page*] and Jeff [*Beck*] together. That's what we wanted Aerosmith to be.

Looking at 1993's *Get a Grip*, your tone seemed to harken back to the bluesy sounds you were known for in the Seventies. Was that intentional?

Yeah, I do think that was kind of what was happening there. I went into *Get a Grip* thinking I'd look to get a cleaner sound again. If you look at a song like "Fever," I remember using a '66 Gibson Firebird, one of my all-time favorite guitars. It's the closest Gibson came to having the best of both worlds. It's meaty sounding, but it's got those mini humbuckers that sound fucking great.

You mentioned "Fever," but can you recall putting together "Cryin'"?

We were in A&M Studios, and I remember having a plexi and a couple of other amps. It was pretty simple; I didn't wanna mess around much. I wanted to get those tones we discussed before, and I felt like having good amps would help. I know I had some old Gibson guitars and some Fenders, but I can't remember recording the solo for that one specifically beyond the fact that I was really getting back into the cleaner sounds.

As I understand it, there's an unreleased version of 1997's *Nine Lives* out there that the public hasn't heard.

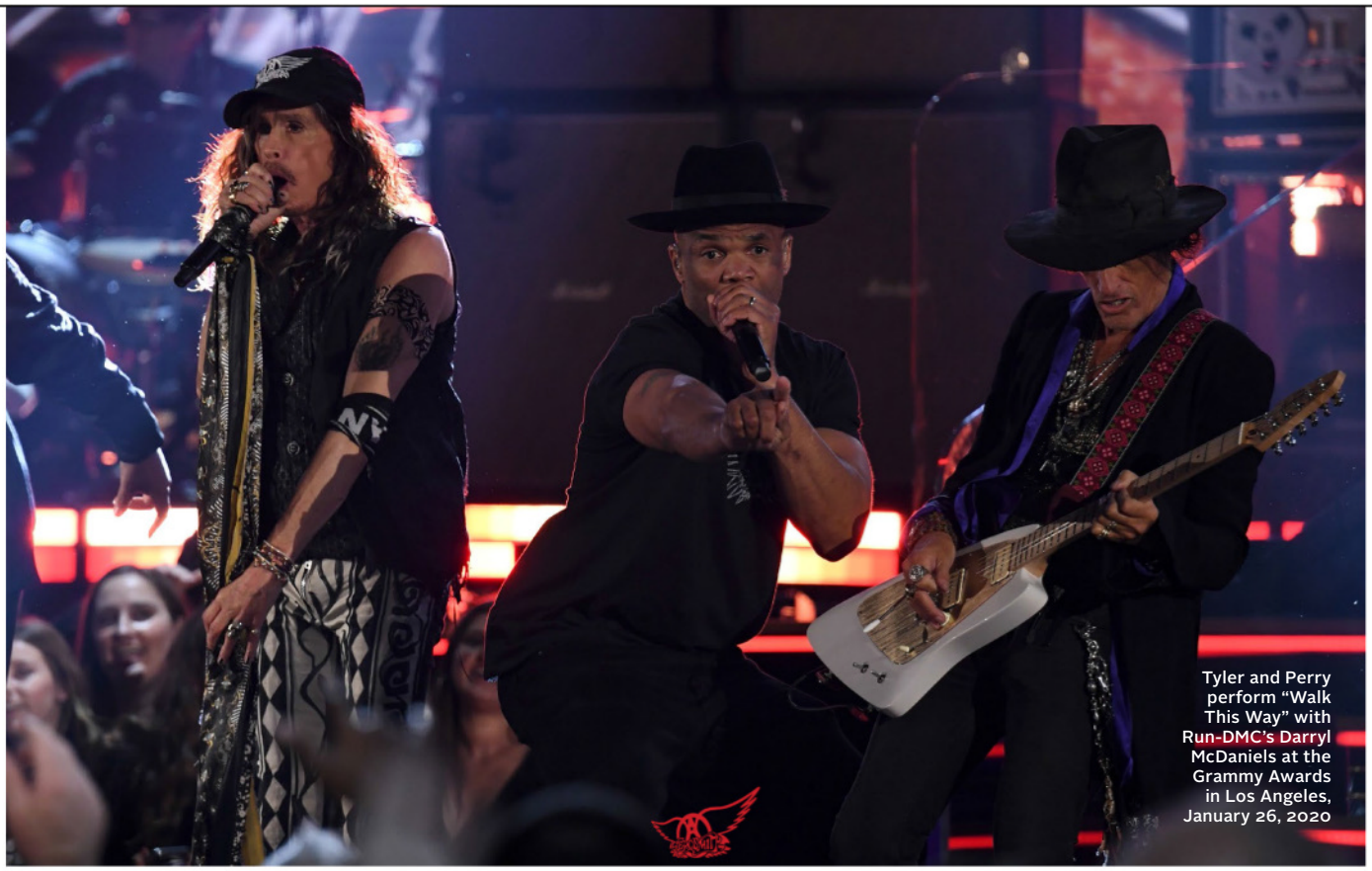
Yeah, that's true. We had recorded that whole record down in Miami, and we'd spent five or six months working on it with [*producer*] Glen Ballard, and we couldn't get a mix down that we really liked. Long story short, when we heard the final rough of it, we didn't like it. It just didn't sound right, and a big part was because Joey wasn't on it; he was having some medical issues, and we'd brought Steve Ferrone in to help, but it just didn't work. And so we got back in the studio with [*producer*] Kevin Shirley and Joey, and it was totally the opposite experience. He had us in the studio playing together live, and we took the same songs and blew through them. It sucks, though, that it took almost a year to make the first version, only to throw it out. I'm actually interested to see if we can go back and mix it and have a whole different take on those songs for people to hear one day.

2001's *Just Push Play* was a massive success. I remember "Jaded" being everywhere. But I've read that it's your least favorite Aerosmith record.

Just Push Play was a tough record to do because we were working with outside writers. And I guess we had gotten used to that by then, but I really wanted to get back to spending time with Steven like we did on the earlier records. We used to spend a couple of weeks just jamming together, putting ideas down and creating the backbone of what the record would be. And we'd gotten so far away from that by *Just Push Play*, and I really wanted to get back to it. But it was hard because we'd had outside writers in the picture for a while, and it was tough to go back.

Has your stance on the record softened?

KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE (BAND) DOUGLAS MASON/WIREIMAGE (DUO)



Tyler and Perry perform "Walk This Way" with Run-DMC's Darryl McDaniels at the Grammy Awards in Los Angeles, January 26, 2020

ROBYN BECK/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

I did as much as I could to keep that old vibe going, and when the four of us were together, it worked. But I don't know; some stuff on there doesn't sound like Aerosmith to me. Steven was working with Mark Hudson on lyrics and was spending a lot of time in L.A. at that point, so the vibe was different. But, yeah, we managed to get some good tunes on there. We experimented with some things, and it was cool to record most of the album at my house at the Boneyard. But the best parts of making that record were seeing the cars in my driveway each day and knowing the guys were together. We had a lot of fun four-wheeling, smoking cigars and hanging out. But musically, there was a lot of pushing and pulling. And there are some songs on there that I could do without, and some songs like "Avant Garden" that I really like.

You had nearly a lifetime's worth of gear at your disposal. Which guitars and amps played the greatest role?

I probably had like 15 or 20 of my best guitars in the studio while we did *Just Push Play*, so I'd have to look at some pictures to try and tell you what ones I used on which song. I used maybe a dozen guitars across the album, so it's hard for me to figure out what I used. I had all my foot pedals down there; it was like recording in my fucking warehouse; all my shit was all over. [*Laughs*] I also had quite a collection of combos and some nice Marshall amps, both new and old. And then I recorded some stuff direct, so it depended on the track.

"THERE'S NO 'MY WAY OR THE HIGHWAY' STUFF AND NO DEBATE ANYMORE"

It's been 11 years since 2012's *Music from Another Dimension*. You're still very creative on the solo and Hollywood Vampires side of things, but no Aerosmith. Why is that?

Even back when we did *Music from Another Dimension*, I wasn't sure we were gonna be able to do another record. Everybody had stuff going on, and really, with that record, we did write some new stuff, but a lot of it was stuff that had been around for as long as 20 years before. For example, there's a song called "Something" I wrote in the early Nineties. And I mainly put it on because I wanted Steven to play drums on it. So if you want to hear what kind of drummer Steven is, give it a listen. [*Laughs*] But we did the record, put it out there, and then Steven went on to do the TV show [American Idol]. I was in the middle of working on my solo record, and we weren't touring as much. We got off doing different things, and over the last few years, it's been hard to get everyone together to do stuff.

Is there a plan to make another record?

I don't know... it's really hard to get everybody together to do it. I'm not saying we'll never make another album, but we've got so much happening and so much stuff in the vaults that needs to come out, so we're focusing on that. I really don't know... we'll have to see how it goes after we do this next run. We've got farewell dates, and we're focused on that. But you never know what can inspire you. I do know we've got to be in the right headspace because there are times when I'd write and I couldn't get Steven to come down and times when Steven would write, and he couldn't get me to come down.

Despite a ton of ups and downs, you and Steven have made it work. After 50-plus years together, what's your secret?

There's so much that's been publicized about us from the Seventies and Eighties, but the truth is we've always had respect for each other's thing. There's no "my way or the highway" stuff and no debate anymore. We can put our ideas on the table and have the five guys decide. Steven and I can talk shit out. If there's an issue, we'll figure it out. I can convince him; he can convince me; we can change each other's minds. That's huge — that's why we're still friends, and it's why we're still together. Honestly, we are not *probably*, but *definitely* better friends now than ever. That's no bullshit. GW

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Aerosmith's Brad Whitford (shown with a Paul Iverson S Type) noodles at a photo shoot in a Tokyo hotel room, September 19, 1990

AEROSMITH

THE FIRST 50 YEARS

PART 2

BRAD WHITFORD — a Berklee-trained musician who's still often referred to as "Aerosmith's other guitarist" — reflects on the lessons learned from "Train Kept A-Rollin'," working with Joe Perry's temporary replacement and the miracle of the band's second act (which is still in progress, by the way). BY ANDREW DALY

KOH HASEBE/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGES

BRAD WHITFORD HAS BEEN ON THE MOVE

— but he's finding peace in a pocket of downtime. And he's going to need it, as Aerosmith is about to embark on its Peace Out farewell tour in a matter of weeks. Some would say it's been a long time coming, while others hoped the road would never end.

But none of that matters to Whitford; he's got a job to do, and for now, at least, all is well, "It's kind of early on," he says. "We've still got a ways to go, but if rehearsals are any indication of anything, it's just slamming. It's sounding so good. I'm just smiling from ear to ear. I love being out there with the guys."

Whitford has long been a positive and calming influence within the ranks of Aerosmith's tornado-like existence. But despite his accomplishments, which include iconic solos and heavy riffs, if you pull up Whitford's Wikipedia page, you'd find that it leads with: "Bradley Ernest Whitford is an American musician who is best known for serving as the rhythm guitarist of the hard rock band Aerosmith." If you've followed along for the last 50 years, the idea that Whitford is just a "rhythm guitarist" should infuriate you. After all, this is the man who penned or co-penned tracks like "Nobody's Fault," "Round and Round" and "Last Child." Not to mention well-known solos on classic cuts like "Kings and Queens" and alternating leads with Joe Perry on "Back in the Saddle" and "Love in an Elevator."

These days, though, the misnomer doesn't bother Whitford much; but during Aerosmith's heyday, his perspective differed. "After *Rocks* came out, Aerosmith was touring England, and I was sitting in a bar in London reading a review of the album in *Melody Maker*," he says. "And when they got to talking about 'Last Child,' they started talking about how it sounded like Jeff Beck, which was very flattering. But then I kept reading, and they gave Joe credit for the guitar solo and kept comparing it to Jeff Beck. I read that, and I fucking went nuclear. I was just so pissed off. It's like, here I am, having my fucking work being compared to Jeff Beck, and they're crediting Joe Perry. It was bullshit, and I was so upset. But I realized stuff like that wasn't worth worrying about because the people who actually listen — and know what they're talking about — can tell the difference."

Like Perry in the late Seventies, Whitford jettisoned himself from Aerosmith when things got too hot in the early Eighties. And like Perry, despite riding through the darkest valleys of an unrelenting business, Whitford returned to Aerosmith in 1984, holding down the fort since.

If you were to ask Whitford, he'd tell you Aerosmith's second act was a "miracle," as is the fact that they're still here today. There's no denying that, along with the big hits, huge shows and legendary albums, when it comes to Aerosmith, things have rarely been easy. To that end, without Whitford's cool-as-the-other-side-of-the-pillow vibe and his tasty licks, the "miracle" that is Aerosmith probably wouldn't be here today, 50-plus years strong.

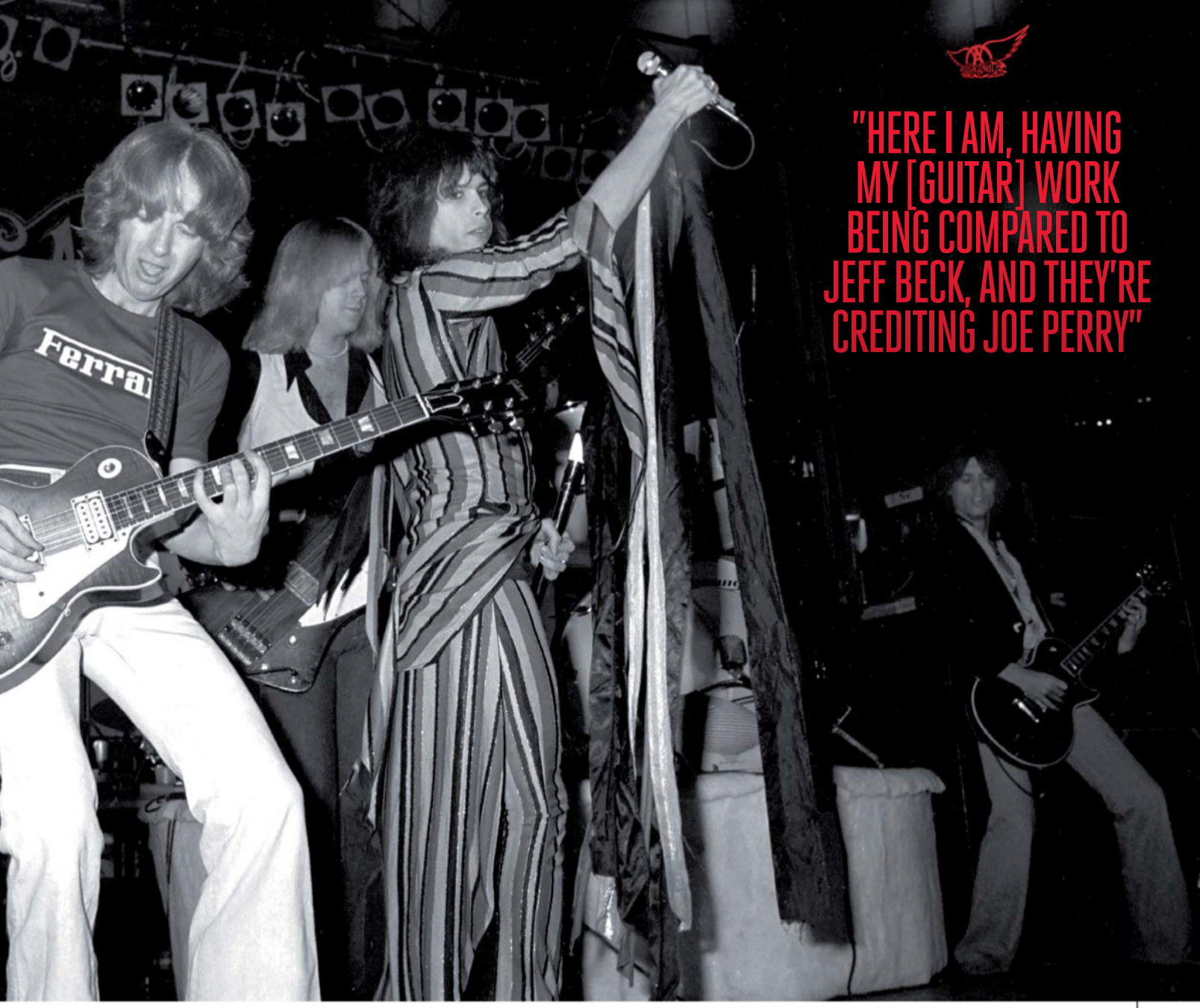
Given the bottomless depths of Aerosmith's valleys and hazardous heights of its peaks, it's sometimes tricky for Whitford to fathom: "It's hard to believe it's been 50 years," he says. "But there are two versions of that. Sometimes, yes, I can believe it. Other times, I just can't. Because as I recollect the many things that have happened in 50 years, sometimes it seems more like 75." [*Laughs*]

[*from left*] Aerosmith's Whitford, Hamilton, Tyler and Perry on stage in late 1975

There's no denying that Steven Tyler is the band's face; to be sure, Joe Perry is his partner in crime. But there is no Aerosmith without its second lead guitarist, Brad Whitford. When asked how he balances Aerosmith's inherent light and shade, Whitford says, "After this call, I'm going to be standing next to Joe Perry pounding out songs all afternoon, and I'll be as happy as a clam. That's what still makes this all worth it. But I can't deny that there was just so much struggle, so much drama and so much pain — and that still comes through sometimes. It comes through as not changing the direction of things you want to do because you know you're not doing that again. It's like, 'I know how this ends; I've seen this movie before; I can recite every line.' I'll take the popcorn and the M&Ms, but you can have the rest." [*Laughs*]

As Aerosmith embark on their final tour, remember this: for 50-plus years, Brad Whitford has been the genuine counterbalance to the wild,

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS



"HERE I AM, HAVING MY [GUITAR] WORK BEING COMPARED TO JEFF BECK, AND THEY'RE CREDITING JOE PERRY"

the provocative, the outlandish and the unbelievable. Through bouts of off-the-cuff bravado meets Berklee-bred brilliance, Whitford has been one-half of what's amounted to the greatest guitar duo in American rock 'n' roll history.

For many, Joe Perry embodies what it means to be a lead guitarist. But in Brad Whitford, Perry found his foil through a profoundly intuitive bond that's bred licks bonded through six-string DNA. Together, Perry and Whitford changed the world, rupturing it to its core and injecting over-amplified energy that still reverberates. So, as you're basking in the glow of Aerosmith's final performances, remember that as Brad Whitford trades solos, riffs and glances with Joe Perry, as he always has, you're not only watching greatness, you're witnessing a lead guitar paradigm that all who came after have tried — and mostly failed — to duplicate.

How did you first become aware of Aerosmith?

I first became aware of Aerosmith in the summer of 1971. I was playing with a couple of guys who also hung out in New Hampshire, where Aerosmith was born. They would talk to me about Joe [*Perry*], Steven [*Tyler*] and Tom [*Hamilton*], but beyond that, I didn't know them or anything about them. Then I played a show up in New Hampshire around that time, and Joe came to see us play, and that was how I first met him and Tom. They watched us play, and we talked for quite a bit afterward. It was really friendly — just a bunch of young guys talking about gear and all that.

What led to you joining after Raymond Tabano left?

About two weeks after I'd met them, I got a call from Joe, and we hung out a bit and got to know each other better. Shortly after, he mentioned something about me maybe joining Aerosmith, and I told him I wasn't [*interested*]. I wasn't jumping up and down or anything, and was like, "I don't even know who you are and what you do yet." Then I said, "Well, I'd like to see you play something." So that's what we did, and they played great. I loved the show and loved what they were doing, so I said, "Yeah, I'd love to be a part of it."

Considering Raymond went way back with some of the guys, were there growing pains?

It was all very strange because there was a little bit of a civil war going on,

AERODYNAMICS

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COMPILED BY ANDREW DALY

BRIAN MAY

My favorite Aerosmith guitar moment? Probably the entire *Rocks* album. Joe gave me a cassette copy of it before it was released, which I still treasure. But probably the greatest of all for me is the headbanging riff in "Sweet Emotion" that follows the verses like a kind of chorus. Stupendous! And it's always a crackin' moment drenched with heavy emotion when they do it live. I love Aerosmith.

NIKKI SIXX

"Last Child" from *Rocks* comes to mind of how important the dueling guitars are to the Aerosmith sound. From the spooky minors being picked in the beginning to the simplified boogie in the verse to the multiple layers as the song heads toward the end, this is Aerosmith at its finest.

WOLFGANG VAN HALEN

I've always liked "Last Child" from *Rocks*. That main riff is so catchy. I especially appreciate the way Brad Whitford plays the muted part live. It gives the riff a cool vibe with the way he doubles it and adds those squeals to it.

STEVE HUNTER

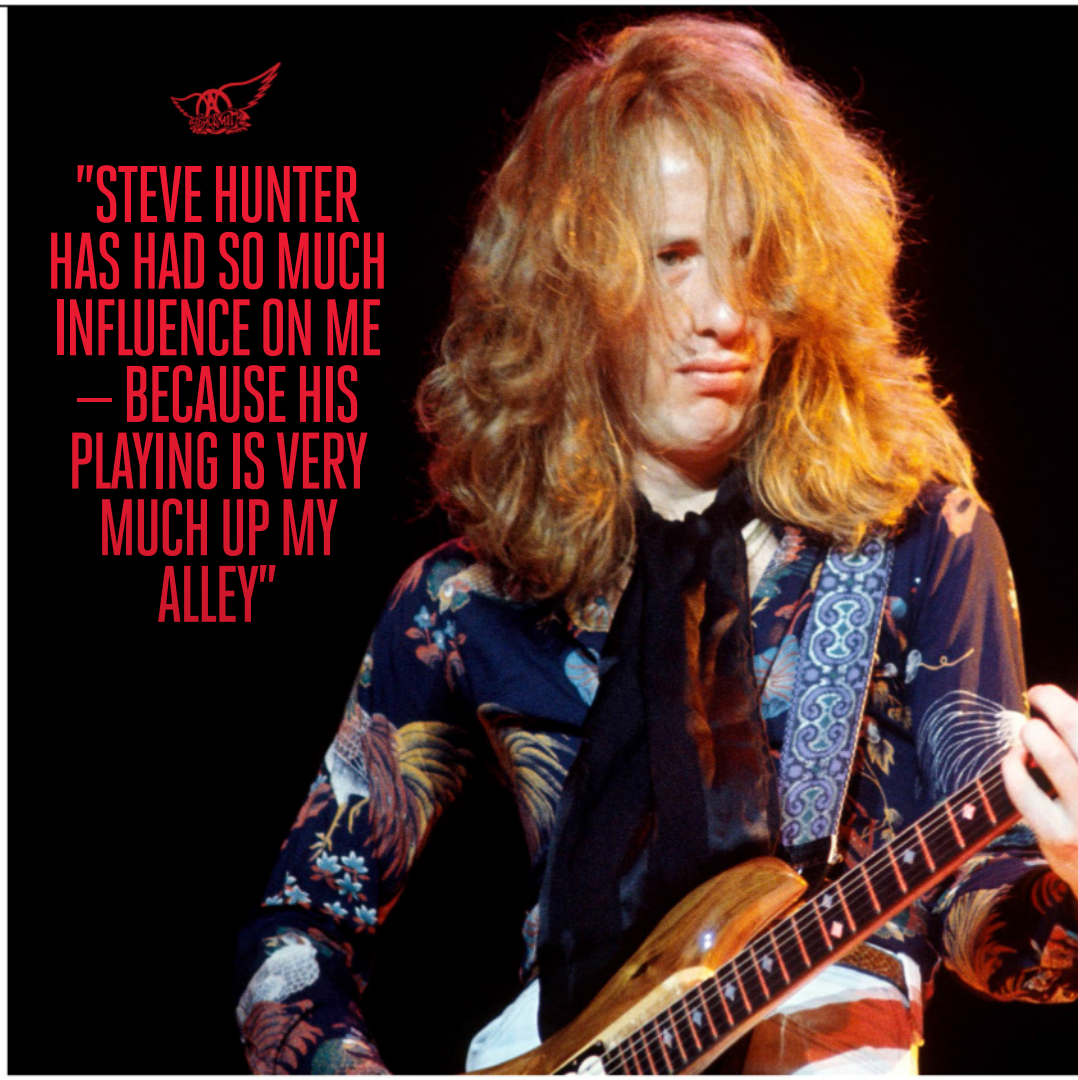
I may have been asked to play on "Train Kept A-Rollin'," but Joe Perry and Brad Whitford are such incredible players. There are so many great riffs and solos, and it's been said before, but the guitars on "Walk This Way" are just brilliant.

TRACII GUNS

Aerosmith's *Live! Bootleg* was one of my go-to jam-along albums when I was a kid. The "Kings and Kings" solo by Brad Whitford is one of the finest in rock history.

ANDY TIMMONS

Though they'll always be one of the greatest grooving American rock bands with incredible swagger, the ballad "Dream On" has



"STEVE HUNTER HAS HAD SO MUCH INFLUENCE ON ME — BECAUSE HIS PLAYING IS VERY MUCH UP MY ALLEY"

even at the beginning with Aerosmith. Joey [*Kramer*], Steven and Raymond were longtime buddies growing up in Yonkers, and I don't think Steven and Joey were 100 percent on board with asking Raymond to step down and Joe asking me to step in. So that was the beginning of the amazing drama and tense moments in and around Aerosmith for me. It was there from the moment I joined, and remains to this very day.

It seems that particular aspect of Aerosmith is deeply tied to the creative process, along with the chemistry between you and Joe Perry. Was that chemistry also immediate?

As far as the chemistry goes, yeah, I think it was immediate. But it was also a very unique chemistry, unlike anything else I've ever experienced with other guitar players. It's 100 percent intuitive, where we've never sat down in a couple of chairs across from each other going, "You do this, you do that." It's always been on the fly from the playing and even with the writing. It was like, "Okay, I'll play this to compliment Joe," and he'd play something to compliment me. That's just how it works. It's a unique gift of symmetry that Joe and I have. It's unlike other relationships with other players, and all I can say is it works, and it's still a lot of fun.

How would you say your style differed from Raymond's?

I'm not sure how we differed as far as playing, but one thing was that I'd show up. [*Laughs*] Raymond was a guy who would pull up on his motorcycle 30 seconds before showtime, literally. But Raymond was also one of Steven's good friends, but there's a dynamic between Steven and his good friends, which is kind of like how it is between him and Joe; it can be extremely volatile. It was the same thing between Steven and Raymond, so I differed from that. But as far as playing is concerned, I was at a much higher skill level at that point, which took the band up a couple of notches, in my opinion.

How did the volatility inherent in Aerosmith's ranks impact the sessions for the debut record?

We were very well-behaved on our first record with

Whitford with a B.C. Rich in 1977. "My thought is still based on the belief that a guitar to a cable to an amp is the best sound," he says. "That's the only way you'll know what a guitar and amp truly sound like and the only way you'll find out if a guy can play"

Adrian Barber producing [*1973's* Aerosmith]. We were just blown away that we had this opportunity, but there was plenty of funny stuff, too. Remember, this was "old era" recording, meaning some of the equipment inside the studio literally was made from cardboard. [*Laughs*] We had EQ systems that were like out of Dr. Frankenstein's laboratory, bass and treble knobs the size of small clocks, and all sorts of gear that seemed like it came out of the 1940s.

And how did that impact the sound of the record?

We did the record in a small room where we set up and recorded live. And the first thing that became apparent, which is really funny, was we had the old-school Hollywood studio's green and red light outside the soundstage door. We'd be inside the room, and this red light was inside our room, and it would go on when the tape was running and recording. So Adrian would yell, "Okay, we're ready to go," and I can only speak for myself, but I was like, "Oh, God, don't fuck up, whatever you do!"

But it was rock 'n' roll, you know? You've just gotta shoot from the hip, and we quickly realized that while we'd be loosey goosey during rehearsals when the red light came on, we became stiff as boards. But we got around that, had fun and did what we could with the limited opportunity for overdubs that we had. We had to be very creative because it's unlike today, where you have limitless ways to fix things. Back then, you had to wait for the tape to rewind. But the end result was just magic.

Joe has echoed your sentiment that there wasn't a lot of conversation about who would do what. But he did mention that an effort was made to create contrasting sounds using different guitars. Is that your recollection, too?

Yeah, that's true. We wanted to create different dynamics through different guitars and the sounds they could make. With the first record, for example, I think the difference in sounds is pretty apparent. I believe Joe was using his black Strat, but I couldn't tell you what year it was. These days, whatever it was, it would be an awesome vintage Strat, but then it was pretty much a new Strat. It was probably a couple of years old, but it sounded great. As for me, I used my '68 Les Paul goldtop, which had P90s in it. We used two guitars on the whole record, which is crazy. Some of the tone we got was pretty wild, and we haven't strayed too far from that.

How so?

Even today, my thought is still based on the belief that a guitar to a cable to an amp is the best sound. That's the only way you'll know what a guitar and amp truly sound like and the only way you'll find out if a guy can play. It's all between the heart and hands, you know?

After you and Joe handled the guitars yourself on the first record, Steve Hunter and Dick Wagner were called in while recording *Get Your Wings*. We know they played on "Train Kept A-Rollin'," but was there more?

Steve and Dick played on "Train Kept A-Rollin'." By the way, "S.O.S. (Too Bad)" is Steve Hunter too. And he played those [*parts*] fucking incredibly beautifully. I don't think I was on "Lord of the Thighs" either, but I remember playing the last little solo section of "Seasons of Wither." There wasn't a whole lot to it. And then "Same Old Song and Dance" was Dick too.

What led to that?

By that point, all the basic tracks were cut at the Record Plant in New York City, and our producer, Jack Douglas, was talking to his boss, Bob Ezrin, the brains behind Alice Cooper's records, and probably some management people at our record company, too. Jack said, "Listen, I've got these great tracks, but they need superior leads over them to sell them." Joe and I had tried multiple times to do something interesting, but I wasn't there yet, and neither was Joe. And if you listen to Steve Hunter's stuff from that time and the level he was able to perform at, it's incredible. So they decided, "Let's bring in the

always been my favorite. It exemplifies the greatness of Aerosmith.

BRUCE KULICK

"Walk This Way" is a wildly successful crossover hit with the sleaziest guitar solos. I'm unsure if it's Joe or Brad, and I don't care! [*Editor's note: Whitford confirms that it was Perry.*] Every riff (as well as the awesome solos) makes this track; with its unique groove, it legitimately rocks! Slinky guitar sounds with sexy string bends make the guitar duo of Aerosmith "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious"!

STEVE MORSE

My favorite three parts are all in the same song: "Walk This Way." First, the opening riff because it is so rhythmic and effective. Second, the rhythm pattern for the verse is a creative variation of the boogie-woogie type of riff. Third, the solo has lots of short melodic phrases that are very powerful.

MICHAEL SWEET

Rocks is the album that gained my attention more than any other Aerosmith album. The guitar tones were heavy, and the performances were solid. It still sounds relevant and has an edge like no other. The songs were also written with a consistency that flowed perfectly. It's my personal favorite Aerosmith guitar album.

RICHIE RANNO (STARZ)

Get Your Wings is one of my all-time favorite rock albums. The solo on "Lord of the Thighs" from 2:24 to 2:42 is amazing. Beautifully phrased and building to a perfect crescendo!

MARTY FRIEDMAN

Aerosmith are gods! When Megadeth toured the U.S. with Aerosmith, that was one of those "I can't believe we are really doing this!" moments. While I'm in awe of the mega-hit-making part of their career, *Rocks* will always be their defining work for me. Everything about it — the songs, the playing, the cover, the production, you name it — was just so beyond cool, especially considering how disco ruled the world at the time it came out. I

even have a sweet bootleg of the album at the rough-mix stage before the vocals were recorded. They were playing like their lives depended on it!

NITA STRAUSS

Aerosmith at the Hollywood Bowl was my first big arena rock show. I giggled at Steven Tyler's quirky ad-libs; I shed real tears during "Don't Wanna Miss a Thing," but most importantly, I was overcome with admiration watching Joe Perry and his effortless swagger. It was truly a life-changing show for a young guitar player to witness!

MALINA MOYE

When they played the Hollywood Bowl, Steven Tyler walked down the stage toward the audience, and Joe Perry was right next to him playing guitar on "Dream On." They looked and sounded like otherworldly rock stars. What a moment! I believe they received a five-minute standing ovation at the end of the performance.

MAX CAVALERA
(SEPULTURA)

I really like the guitars on *Rock in a Hard Place*, especially "Lightning Strikes." I remember meeting them in the airport on the way to Brazil; this was in 1994... we shot the shit a little bit and ended up on the same flight to Rio.

STEVE LUKATHER

"Sweet Emotion" — for a few reasons: it's not only a killer riff and a killer song, but the tone of the guitars makes me smile every time! Joe and Brad have such incredible interplay, which is not easy.

ALEX SKOLNICK

"Walk This Way" features one of the all-time greatest single-note riffs, period. I remember thinking it had a funky quality, like the more rock moments of Parliament-Funkadelic, Ohio Players, etc. So I wasn't surprised that "Walk This Way" became a hit again with Run-DMC. But for me, that awesome, attitude-fueled single-note riff is the most important element.

GEORGE DE SOTA/REDFERNS

Alice Cooper team and see what they can do."

Were you and Joe frustrated by that decision?

It was Jack who had the difficult task of breaking the news to Joe and me, and of course, that went down like a lead balloon. [*Laughs*] At first you fight, and you're a little bit angry, and then you get sad to where you're like really bummed out that you can't do it. And the thing was that we'd done some good stuff and could play good stuff, but the tracks required some real finesse, you know? But I mean... listen to "Train Kept A-Rollin'" today; those are some fucking genius rock leads. That was some great stuff and probably some of the stuff that they were most proud of out of anything they'd done. That solo is blistering.

Were you there while he recorded it, or did you hear it after the fact?

I had the unique pleasure of being in the studio when Steve came in to cut the "Train" solo. It was fucking amazing. He came in with a little Fender tweed, with a '57 Les Paul Junior with a P90. He set the amp down, grabbed the guitar, they started rolling tape, and Steve did several passes. Then Steve says, "Okay, I think I've got it now," and then he did his final pass, which was just mind-blowing. I listen back to it even today, and it's still a lesson on guitar. Since then, Steve has had so much influence on me as a player because his playing is very much up my alley. I continue to learn some of the nuances in his playing. And Dick was a bit more like Joe, so it worked out very well.

After that experience, did your and Joe's approach change during the recording of *Toys in the Attic* and *Rocks*?

A lot of the guitar sounds we recorded were done through such a simplistic approach. It's something I can't make work today because it takes a lot of work and searching around. But pretty much all of it was done with 100-watt Marshall half-stacks. We had all these great vintage Marshall amps full of greenbacks; we just plugged straight into those. That's what you hear on *Toys* and *Rocks*. For us, it was all about the attitude. The approach was about making it tight and having the guitar parts pop but also groove. That's what made it for us. That's the sound and the attitude. But there was a fair amount of

[*from left*] A high-flying Whitford, Tyler and Perry in the summer of 1988

"I WAS SO ELATED TO BE WORKING WITH THE GUYS IN AEROSMITH AGAIN"

precision on those rhythm tracks. There's a cool Japanese import of *Rocks* that's just the guitar tracks. I listened back to it, and I had to put a diaper on; I loved it so much. Have you heard it?

I have. It's outstanding.

It really is. And another thing about the Japanese version is the drums are turned up, which is a story in and of itself. When we made *Rocks*, certain people behind the mixing console weren't going out of their way to make the drums sound good. Our drummer had a certain amount of attitude, which wasn't really appreciated. [*Laughs*] Jack Douglas and Jay Messina were the kind of guys that if they didn't have a lot of love in their hearts for someone, they'd take it out on them. And Joey was famous for turning people off with his attitude, so they turned the drums down. So there's a little personal vendetta that no one knew about. I honestly don't think the rest of the band even knows this. [*Laughs*]

There's an argument to be made that the attitude within Aerosmith's ranks is part of what made the Seventies era great, no?

Well, yeah, but what was nice about that period was that we could still do what we call "practice." We rehearsed a lot, so we knew exactly what we were doing, unlike later albums where we'd have to come up with stuff while there were no vocals or anything. We'd have no direction and no real idea what we were gonna do. And Steven was usually very involved in arrangements, but if he didn't know what the fuck he was going to do, he couldn't have anything to say about the arrangement.

I can imagine that being difficult to navigate.

You can hear it on some throwaway tracks on later records where there are guitar riffs, and then there's some stupid yodeling from Steven because he never did his work. I would have loved to have B-sides like the Stones, but we didn't because we weren't mature enough or ready to admit it or able to get Steven to do the work he was supposed to do. After *Toys* and *Rocks*, that's what we were up against. The bucks and the drugs started to flow, and a lot of it was such a waste. But right now, we're rehearsing, and we've got a list of about fucking kickass songs out of all that. So I would never complain; I'm just telling you the truth. What we have is great, but unfortunately, there was a lot of wasted tape.

Do you feel Aerosmith reached their full potential?

I think we were at our full potential on day one. I don't know if we realized it, but I say that because of one guy and one song, and that's Steven bringing in "Dream On." I don't know what it is, but to this day, it's still everywhere. And Steven had that in his back pocket when we started the first record. So when we talk about potential, looking at "Dream On," Aerosmith was sitting on a nuke. And like I said, we went through *Toys* and *Rocks*, and so much of it slipped away. But there were still some shining moments here and there.

Given your chemistry with Joe, was it difficult when he walked away during the *Night in the Ruts* sessions?

I can only tell you what I experienced, so I can't speak for anybody else. But Joe left, and I said, "Okay, now what are we gonna do?" So we auditioned players, and there were a bunch of great guys, but in the end, we chose Jimmy [*Crespo*]. And looking back, Jimmy had the same look as Joe, with dark hair and a very dark mood about him. But don't get me wrong — Jimmy is a great player. The dynamic between Jimmy and me was very different from how Joe and I worked. Jimmy and I would sit down and work things out in fine detail. Jimmy was very into that, and I loved it, so I loved playing with him, too.

What was the point of no return that led to the end of Aerosmith's first era?

After Jimmy came aboard, we were trying to do a new album. So the record company said, "That's fine. What is it? What are you going to do?" But we didn't even have a demo, so the plan became that in the summer of 1980, we were going to go in and work on trying to make three

EDDIE MARTINEZ (EX-RUN-DMC)

There's something really special and different about "Jaded." Is it the heaviest of their amazing catalog? No, but there's something so cool in the way Joe Perry and Brad Whitford apply major 7 chords to the main riffs, as well as in the IV chord in the verses. It's intoxicatingly hooky and unorthodox, and it rocks. This is not an easy task. And let's not forget the shimmering major add9 chords at the beginning of the verses, as well as the descending chords in the bridge, which create tension that gets released heading into the final big chorus. It's a deftly written tune with great guitar parts that rings differently from the rest.

LAURA JANE GRACE (AGAINST ME!)

I don't know about the best guitar moment, but I will tell you this — the single most satisfying use of a triangle in a rock song ever (yes, a triangle) happens in the fourth verse of the song "Sweet Emotion" under the lyric "Stand in the front just a shakin' your ass...." It's so subtle, and I'm guessing most people would never even have the ear to listen for it, but every time I hear it, I am filled with complete satisfaction and joy. It elevates the remainder of the song so fully. The part is so simple and cool, it makes me want to be the triangle player in a band. Whoever had the idea to introduce that element that late in the song deserves an award. I guess the riff in that song is cool too.

JOHN 5

When I was a kid and I heard the "Dream On" intro, it just really changed my life. I thought it was so beautiful, and how could someone write and play something like that? I couldn't get over it. It sounded like the most beautiful music I've ever heard."

RICHARD PATRICK (FILTER)

Joe and Brad's guitar playing in "Back in the Saddle" is so absolutely perfect. It makes me wish I had written it!

ADRIAN VANDENBERG

To call Aerosmith "The American

Rolling Stones," as they often have been, never really covered it for me. Swagger-laden grooves, cool guitar work and great solos by Joe and Brad. They have the power, talent and personality to even turn not so much blues-based, poppy songs into radio-friendly tracks that still have that organic, unmistakable Aerosmith grit, swagger and attitude. I've been a fan since "Dream On" became a hit even in my (unfortunately) pop-oriented home country of Holland back in the day, and I still am. Big time!

PAT THRALL
(PAT TRAVERS BAND)

One of my favorite Aerosmith albums is *Nine Lives*. On the song "The Farm," Joe plays some super nasty riffs with an unusual chord sequence of 1 to flat 5. The solo is incredible, and it starts with a double stop that he overbends completely. Talk about a badass attitude. His tone is incredible as well!

ERIC JOHANSON

"Sweet Emotion." I've always been blown away by the way this song's pre-chorus is just a badass guitar riff with no lyrics, climbing and building toward that big chorus of harmony vocals. When I started playing guitar, I was always drawn to learning single-string riffs like that.

CARLOS CAVAZO
(EX-QUIET RIOT, KING KOBRA)

My favorite Aerosmith guitar moment comes from "Train Kept A-Rollin'." It blows me away. I've always loved the song; the guitar playing was beyond amazing, and everybody in the band was on fire. They've had a stellar career and continued reinventing themselves with every album. I've met the guys, and they were the coolest guys you could ever meet."

SCOTTI HILL
(SKID ROW)

"Last Child" Is a perfect example of how two guitar players can counterpoint each other in a question-and-answer fashion. Snake [*Sabo*] and I have used it as a reference more times than I can remember. Brad and Joe are the perfect combination of how players can complement by playing off each other.

demos. And at that same time, I was writing with Derek St. Holmes for the first record we did. I was working on that and had about four weeks before I needed to head back to New York and be with Aerosmith at The Power Station.

So I get up there to New York City, and it's me, Tom and Joey showing up each day at the studio, and we're waiting for Steven to arrive and hopefully come up with something. And then he'd arrive, and we'd literally do nothing. Steven would show up, and they'd carry him into the reception room, and he'd be on the chair or the couch like a bag of potatoes, and that's where he'd stay. We were doing this day after fucking day, and the "fucking" just came out because I still remember how pissed I was. I was like, "This is a joke. We're spending money on this."

Is that what led you to quit?

I decided to take some time off and go home to Massachusetts for a couple of days. After that, I was supposed to go back to New York, but I was a total wreck. I got to Logan Airport in Boston, called our manager David Krebs, and said, "I'm done. I can't do this. You will not see me in New York." I hung up the phone, and that was it. I felt like I'd just moved a mountain off my back. I felt like I could breathe again. All this weight was off my shoulders, and I honestly didn't care. I was also happy about the Whitford/St. Holmes thing. It was productive. It worked. It was real. It was tangible. It wasn't this thing that had just slipped out of our hands, which was sad, ugly and covered in drugs.

Do you feel Columbia Records properly supported Whitford/St. Holmes?

I look back on that stuff, and yeah, I think they were gung-ho about it. They were ready to go with it. There were two-page ads in *Billboard*, and a lot of people seemed to really love the record. Budgets went down, and there was only a finite amount of money that could be used for promotion. But we had a pretty good start and a lot of fun. I still love that record. I still listen to it along with the new one we did side by side, and I think what we had is pretty unique.

MICK HUTSON/REDFERNS (BAND) FUTURE (GW)

What led to the classic Aerosmith lineup getting back together in '84?

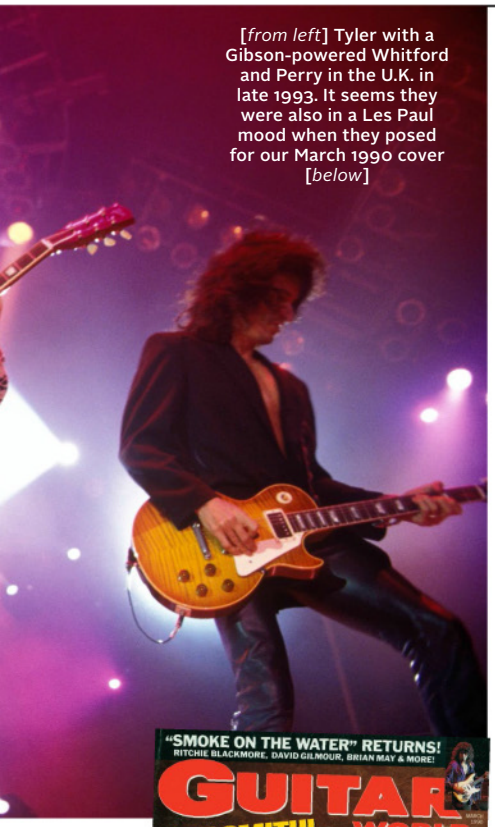
The whole time I was doing the Whitford/St. Holmes thing, and then when I started playing with Joe again, I'd be in the studio with other Leber-Krebs clients, and they'd say, "When are you going to get back together with Aerosmith?" And I always had the same story: "I'll tell you what — it comes down to Steven Tyler and Joe Perry. If they can find some way to bury their hatchets, I would follow them." But I honestly thought it would never happen.

But it did happen. Going in, did you have concerns about being able to contend in a scene that had changed so much?

I don't think I really got that far ahead. I was so elated to be working with the guys in Aerosmith again. Being back with the guys was refreshing, and the fact that we were all in the same room together again and rehearsing those songs was incredible. We didn't have a grand plan beyond getting to that point, so we didn't really think about the level of success we could have. I was just so pleased that things seemed to be on some kind of road to somewhere again.

Was it a surprise to see Aerosmith's second wave of success come by way of a crossover collaboration with Run-DMC on "Walk This Way"?

Of course. No one knew how gigantic that was going to be. And I've always believed that the spirit of collaboration broadens the scope of anything. So I definitely thought it was a very cool idea. The only problem was that it was originally proposed to us as something the whole band was going to do, but then it was only Joe and Steven who went into the studio to do it with them. And truly, that was all that was needed, and it was done



[*from left*] Tyler with a Gibson-powered Whitford and Perry in the U.K. in late 1993. It seems they were also in a Les Paul mood when they posed for our March 1990 cover [*below*]

right. But the rest of us were kind of miffed about it at the time. We disagreed and thought we should at least sit on the couch in the control room and be a part of it. But it wasn't an artistic decision... probably more of a budgetary decision. But looking back, it was just such a huge moment in music history from that period.

The record that followed, *Permanent Vacation*, catapulted Aerosmith into the heart of the MTV era. I've always loved your leads on the title track. Any memories?
Well, thank you. I appreciate that. Recording it is a little blurry, but I recall wanting to go for a sound that was a little more like what Stevie Ray Vaughan was doing. I believe I did that by using a Strat, so it was more a matter of going in knowing how I wanted the solo to sound. It's kind of like when you put a song on, and you hear it, and you like the sound when you listen to it. I knew the sound I wanted, grabbed one of my Strats and did the solo.

Did Aerosmith feel comfortable during the MTV era, given its status as an "older band?"
A story that puts that into perspective had to do with "Dude (Looks Like a Lady)" and what inspired it. For as much as Steven, or any of us, looked like young girls with all the makeup and the hair, Steven was really pushing the envelope. [*Laughs*] And that's where the impetus of that came from. I think Steven had actually said to himself, "Dude looks like a lady." You had younger bands like Mötley Crüe doing the glam thing and even other older bands like Kiss, along with us all being listened to by young kids. It was an interesting time and kind of outrageous. The kids who were listening to us didn't care about our amps; it was about having good hair. [*Laughs*]

You mentioned the unspoken chemistry between you and Joe, which seems devoid of ego. An example is your alternating leads heard on "Love in an Elevator." How does something like that come together?
Yeah, that's true. The thing about Joe is he likes to construct his solos beforehand, whereas I shoot from the hip with just about everything. I was always the one-take, "get it on the first try" guy. So with most of the solos — and this was the case with "Love in an Elevator" — Joe would listen and then try some different things. I'd typically come up with an opening section that would then break down into a rhythm part and lead into Joe's entrance. And when Joe comes in there, that part he does — wow, it's just so cool, right? It's classic and such a great lick that he came up with. It's so badass. So I'd just shoot from the hip or throw out some ideas I may have had in my head. A lot of what you hear is what came right off the bat.

There are no defined roles between you and Joe, but people still incorrectly label you the rhythm guitarist and Joe the lead. Has that been frustrating for you?
It bothered me for many years, but then I realized, "Okay, anyone that thinks that is someone who simply does not listen." And you're right; we don't have defined roles; we're both just guitar players in this band. If someone specifically labels us as one or the other, they're not listening. That's their problem. It's not my problem that they can't hear the difference. Sure, there have been times over the decades when Joe and I can imitate each other, but that's only because we're huge fans of each other's styles. But I'll tell you what — I cannot play like Joe Perry. I can't do it.

What makes Joe unique?
Joe has such an elite sense of timing, rhythm and note choices. I don't do that. I'm more Berklee-inspired. I'm always thinking about intervals, scales, chords and how they're supposed to fit together. Joe is very different; he's not schooled. So sometimes it doesn't work for him, and sometimes he'll try playing over something, and he doesn't realize it's not pentatonic, but he does find notes, and while he doesn't always know how or why it's working, he doesn't really care because it does work.

SAMMY BOLLER

Aerosmith was a huge band for me when I was a kid. I clearly remember the day I sat on the edge of my bed for hours, trying to learn how to play "Dream On." The solo on that song is still one of my favorites. The interplay of the guitars on *Rocks* is a textbook on how to play in a two-guitar band.

ORIANTHI

One of my favorite Joe Perry Aerosmith guitar moments was when I first saw "Walk This Way" come on TV as a kid in the Eighties. That riff is so badass I wanted to learn it right away! Another moment was getting to jam out with Joe Perry, Steven Tyler and Alice Cooper at the *Dark Shadows* premiere!

VINNIE VINCENT
(EX-KISS)

I met Aerosmith in the fall of 1973 in New York at the Record Plant while they were doing guitars for their first record. I recorded some demos in another room in the same studio and decided to stop by to say hello. I could tell they could really play, and someone snapped a Polaroid of us. Great memories!

NANCY WILSON

Heart opened for Aerosmith a few times in the late Seventies, and opening for them quadrupled our coolness factor. Joe and Steven were super sweet to us, and there was no sabotage to the opening band by the headlining band, which was often the case. We'd been plagued by being unplugged or PA systems running at half volume, but Aerosmith was a class act. Steven could have been Mick Jagger's American brother and was certainly precocious enough, to say the least.

PAUL GILBERT

The solo at the end of "Three Mile Smile" starts with a slide up the low E string, going into the top strings being played explosively, "eeyooooooooooo-WAHHH!" It only lasts a couple of seconds, but I can listen to that over and over. Perry or Whitford? I don't know. I love them both. [*Editor's note: Whitford confirms that it was Perry.*]

LZZY HALE

One of my all-time favorite guitar moments/riff-driven songs by Aerosmith is "Last Child," written by Brad Whitford. The main guitar riff is a tremendous hook throughout the track that gets your hips movin' and lips droolin'. You can say it's blues rock at its finest, yes, but it is so much more than that. There is an intangible energy to it that is as familiar as your own heartbeat. Capturing that bones and blood primal rhythm on a guitar is a huge feat that not many guitarists have in them. Brad Whitford makes it as effortless as breathing on this track. I dare you not to boogie!

JEFF SCHROEDER
(SMASHING PUMPKINS)

Live! Bootleg was the first Aerosmith album I was exposed to as a young child, and it's the one that to this day resonates with me the most. Perhaps a bit of a strange choice; I see it as a wonderful representation of the band's first period. Across the 17 or 18 songs that make up the double album, we hear the culmination of an incredible live band. The performances are a little bit looser and rawer compared to the studio versions, and the intensity level is quite high. It's hard not to listen without a bit of nostalgia for the days when bands were based upon the quality of their live show. There are no video walls or backing tracks — just good songs and great playing. Both Brad Whitford and Joe Perry are completely on fire on the album. It's blues-based rock playing at some of its best. You can hear how this became one of the templates for the next generation of bands like Guns N' Roses. I also love the covers of "Train Kept A-Rollin'" and "Come Together."

BUZZ OSBORNE

Aerosmith has at least 10 songs I will never tire of, with "Nobody's Fault" being my absolute favorite from a guitar perspective. It's a devastating monster. Aerosmith are great songwriters and great players, and I've loved their music since I was about 12. Even at 12, I clearly had good taste!

MYLES KENNEDY

My favorite guitar moment

Whitford in Las Vegas, September 22, 2012. "We're extremely tight and deeply bound together. But when you have that many disappointments over time, it really hurts"

CHRISTOPHER POLK/GETTY IMAGES FOR CLEAR CHANNEL

And truthfully, that's a real gift that Joe has. I doubt Robert Johnson knew what fucking intervals he was working within a musical sense or what that looked like on paper — but who gives a shit? It's the same with Joe, so who cares if he knows what he's doing, because what he's doing is fucking killer. Joe is gifted, talented and uniquely his own, which is rare in a world where there are tens of millions of people with guitars in their hands.

It's probably a generational thing, with younger fans often feeling *Get a Grip* [1993] is Aerosmith's definitive album, while older fans tend to choose *Rocks* [1976]. Which is it for you?

I think you're right about the generational way of thinking because, to me, it's *Rocks*. If I had to go to a desert island with just one of our albums, *Rocks* would be it. So put that on my gravestone — it's *Rocks*. I hear that, and having been a part of that and understanding the vibe and the spirit that went into that, I know it's all in there. But that's me. I don't know what other people think. Everybody will always have a different opinion, especially the guys in the band. But for me, *Rocks* is the defining moment for us.

And where does *Get a Grip* fall within the Aerosmith canon, considering it netted the band a Grammy and a massive success in the thick of the grunge era?

It was huge. And with the grunge thing, we were never gonna let the flag for rock 'n' roll come down. When Kiss decided to do a disco record in the late Seventies, we were like, "Oh my God." We said, "Is this really where it's going? It's all slipping right out of our fingers." But we've never been a band that would let go of it. So with *Get a Grip*, we were just so proud of it and how well it did. So it lives on. But as far as punk and grunge, maybe it's because I'm a bit of a Berklee-head, but it took me years to appreciate that. It wasn't until years later that I realized that bands like the Ramones were right in my pocket. I don't know what I was thinking;

I wasn't into it then. But there's so much freedom in the performances, and I love how those bands went for it by sticking it to the people who deserved it.

Aerosmith have released just four studio albums in the 30 years since *Get a Grip*. Why is that?
I cannot put my finger on it. I guess I'll call it out-and-out laziness. Because I'm still writing, and I still play guitar every day. I don't know... I can't figure out what happened. Other than maybe frustration because sometimes it was like a woman being in labor and not wanting to do that, I can't figure it out.

Is the desire to make new music still there?
Maybe six or seven years ago, we were on the phone having a meeting with everybody, and the subject came up. So I asked, and I had a very simple plan; I said, "Let's pick a city or studio, and we'll book it for one day; it can be a day that works for us all, maybe a Saturday." I said, "Everybody can fly in Friday and Saturday morning; we have an open-ended session with one goal: to make a song and have one demo."

That sounds reasonable, given the band's recording history.
Right. I play every day. I pick up the guitar, and out of my hands comes something that I've never played before. Maybe it would be an intro or even the main riff. I know Joe Perry and Tom Hamilton do that too. So I said, "We go in and come out with at least a one-song demo. I don't even care if Steven just sings 'blah, blah, blah.'" I said that, and they just said, "Oh, we can't do that." I was in shock; it's not rocket science for us. It's not impossible, and we've done it before. I don't care if the song was a piece of shit; it was to be an exercise in creativity. But nobody wanted to fucking do it. So I threw my hands up in the air, and that's where my hands remain to this day.

Is *Music from Another Dimension!* Aerosmith's final studio record?
Yeah... I think that it is. And that's sad because, I hate to say this, and we were talking about the idea of potential earlier, but that was just a piss-poor record. It's like... where is that certain something? I guess it got left behind somewhere. I think there are just a lot of scars, I guess I would say. And, God knows, we love the shit out of each other; we're brothers through and through. But there's a lot of dark stuff from the past, and I guess, like with anybody else, it's hard to get past that.

Looking back on 50 years, how do you reconcile the good with the bad?
Those emotional bruises don't go away. When you lose a part of that, it's not something that goes away. And that's how close we are; Aerosmith is a very close-knit family relationship. We're extremely tight and deeply bound together. But when you have that many disappointments over time, it really hurts. I've let go of as much as I can. And in doing that, my goal is to always bring positive energy and love to whatever we do.

Do you still feel as close to the guys as you once did?
Well, there's a vacuum, and like I said, I love all the guys; we have great affection for each other. We all have that; it never went away. And oftentimes, we'll be standing in a little circle while we're rehearsing or just talking, and Steven will say, "Can you believe we're still doing this?" And we're like, "No. It's honestly unbelievable." There's more appreciation for the higher powers as we go along because it's truly a miracle that we're still here doing this. And we tried to keep it the original five for as long as we could, and even though Joey isn't here on drums for this last tour, we still have so much love and respect for each other. That's something that will forever be frozen in time.

Bands often announce farewell tours, only to return a few years later. Is this really it for Aerosmith?
In my mind, it's not possible to keep going. I don't bullshit anybody; I just don't do it, and sometimes that upsets people. That's just the way it is. People have to be willing to accept that. And I was probably the last person to sign on for this tour because even though this is a multimillion-dollar business, the reality is you've got to work awfully hard to end up in a good place financially. But it's not really rocket science, and it should always be more fun than you've ever had, right? There shouldn't be any drama; we humans have enough shit going on. So when we finish this tour, that's going to be it.

Who is America's greatest rock and roll band? Kiss or Aerosmith?
That's a really tough one. I think you'd have to come up with things to sort that out categorically. But what I love about Kiss is they can go on forever because of their makeup. So that's one aspect of what they do that's very different from what we do. But the last Kiss show I saw was absolutely brilliant, and there are days when I've come off the stage with Aerosmith and just went, "Wow. What the hell was that? How do I recreate that?"

Some shows are great, and you search for ways to do it again, but that's the beauty of this. You never know when you're going to have one of those supernatural shows. It's not something you can rehearse; a lot of it comes down to the band and the audience. Sometimes you end up with a magic moment you can't predict; I think all the good bands have those moments. We have them, and so does Kiss. I don't know how you choose. GW

from Aerosmith is the breakdown riff at 2:30 in "Love in an Elevator." The rhythm section establishes a great foundation, and then that riff comes in... so good! It's impossible not to start moving your head in time. I remember playing that song in my high school cover band, feeling like it was a high point in the set. After all these years, I still think it rules.

MARK TREMONTI

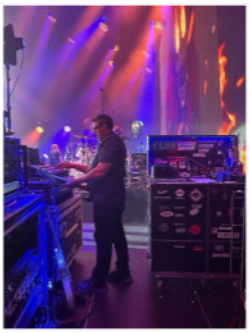
"Last Child" is one of the standout guitar moments from Aerosmith. It is just so down and dirty. It immediately gets you bobbing your head and sets an undeniable mood with that groove. I just love it.

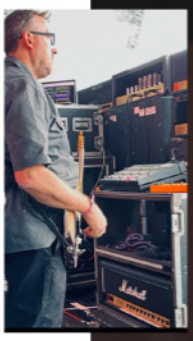
SATCHEL
(STEEL PANTHER)

It's hard to pick a favorite Aerosmith guitar moment because there are so damned many. But the riff from "Back in the Saddle" is one that I put on when it's time to go out there and [*kick ass*]. I'm pretty sure they were going for that, and they nailed it. The great thing about this song is it sounds just as killer when you play it backward. And even better when you are wasted, and it's backward. Or forwards, depending on what you're on. This song has everything; the guitar riffs drive it from start to finish, and it's classic Aerosmith.

STEVE LYNCH

While Autograph was touring with Aerosmith in 1985, I had a delightful interlude backstage with Joe Perry. As I was standing in the hallway backstage warming up before the show, Joe saw me practicing my two-handed technique. He asked me what I was playing, to which I replied, "some double-pentatonic using all four fingers on each hand." Since he also had his guitar on, he asked me to show him a few ideas. I gladly obliged and showed him the basis of what I was playing. But when I got into the interval skips while playing the double-pentatonic, it threw him, and he said, "To hell with that! I have no idea what you're doing!" I laughed at that. And when I started playing some of his old solos from the Seventies that I used to play in cover bands, he said, "You've got





SHOW ME THE WAY

Darren Hurst: on the job!

After five years working with Peter Frampton, **DARREN HURST** became Joe Perry's tech and quickly helped the Aerosmith guitarist unlock his signature tones. BY ANDREW DALY

A SHORT WHILE ago, Joe Perry was struggling with his tone. That's not to say his chops had faded; it was more a matter of years of sonic exploration having left things a bit muddy. Luckily, just as he was preparing for Aerosmith's impending Las Vegas residency, he met Darren Hurst, a man who, in almost no time at all, unlocked the signature sounds that made Aerosmith one of the greatest rock bands in history.

"I had done five years with Peter Frampton, and as we know, Peter had announced that he was retiring," Hurst says. "While I was off the road, I got a call from a friend named Aidan Mullen, bass tech for Def Leppard and a friend of the Aerosmith camp. He said, 'I don't know your plans for the next few years, but Joe Perry is hurting and needs a tech.' He said Joe is a great guy who's great to work for, so I said, 'Sure, give him my number!' I got a call from Joe the following Saturday, and before I knew it, I was in Vegas. Once I got there, I was able to get the guitars sounding better than before. Joe said, 'How do I keep you?'"

It'd be all too easy to simplify what Perry does. A Strat here, a Les Paul there. Oh, and a backline of vintage tube amps. Not too crazy, right? Wrong.

"I've been a Joe Perry fan for years," Hurst says. "I know what Joe's sound is. I've been in the crowd for dozens of Aerosmith shows at various points in my life. Combined with my years as a tech, I was able to figure out what Joe needed to deliver those iconic songs."

When asked to explain the secret to Perry's sound, Hurst says, "It's not a high-gain sound, but you need a certain amount of drive and a bit of a mid-bump, too. Naturally, when I think about those sounds, I lean toward pieces of gear. But that's tricky because Joe has a massive collection of gear, which was part of the issue. The difficulty is that he wanted to use everything, and things had gotten homogenized."

When Hurst arrived in Vegas, the first order of business was simplifying Perry's rig while still satiating the guitarist's thirst for sonic exploration. In short, Perry had a lifelong case of G.A.S. (Gear Acquisition Syndrome), and Hurst — who surely sympathizes — was just what the doctor ordered.

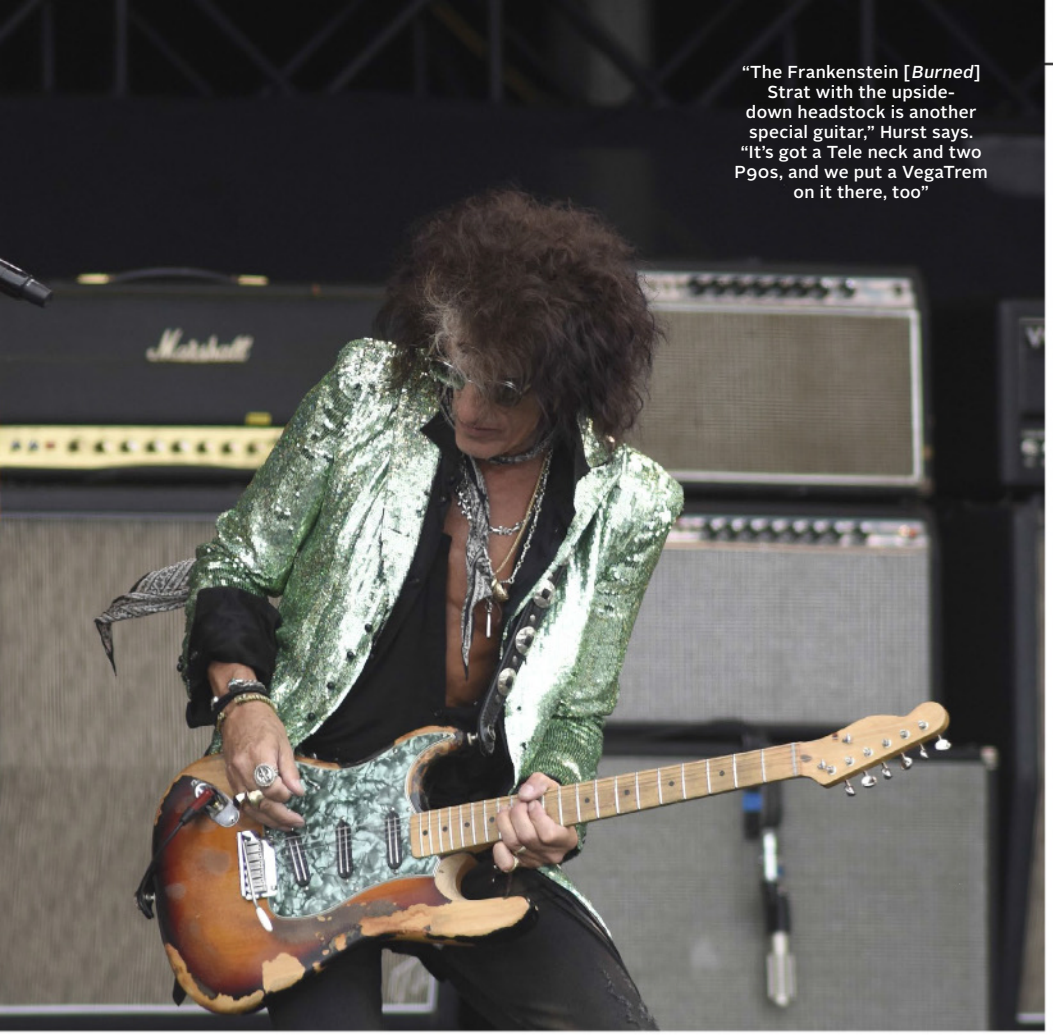
"When I got there, Joe had a Marshall JCM, a Fender, a Magnatone and a bunch of pedals," Hurst says. "But the big issue was that the gain structure was all wrong from what I thought he needed. So I just revoiced everything and dialed in that classic gain structure that Joe made famous. We've all heard the songs and solos, so that sound has been out there for a long time. You need drive for the solos — but remember, Joe's rhythm playing is very powerful and clean sounding. It's clean but also has just a little bit of breakup. You want that creamy, clean sound and smooth sustain, but you also want a bit of grit. So I first ran things through a compressor on the front end for some clean tones — then I added the Ibanez Tube Screamer [*TS9*]."

For Hurst, adding gear was the fun part. But remember — Perry has a ton of gear, which was commingling in not-so-satisfactory ways. So it was critical for Hurst to refrain from being the proverbial kid in the sandbox, meaning he needed to *remove* gear from the equation, no matter how tasty it was.

"Joe loves gear," Hurst says. "His collection is so massive, and there's a lot of stuff to pick through. He's a tweaker and a tone chaser, and if we hit a bar, he wants to raise it right away. But I love that about Joe because it's dangerous, which is what rock music is about. There's absolutely no predictability to this. And that's a challenge for me because that lack of predictability means I need to keep him inspired.

"If you know anything about Joe, you'll know he rarely plays the same songs on the same guitars. He might use a Telecaster for 'Sweet Emotion' one night and a Les Paul the next. Other times he's on a Strat kick; other nights, he only wants to play hollow-body guitars. But he wants to hear the flavors and fingerprints of those

COURTESY OF DARREN HURST (HURST) TIM MOSENFELDER/WIREIMAGE (DUO)



"The Frankenstein [*Burned*] Strat with the upside-down headstock is another special guitar," Hurst says. "It's got a Tele neck and two P90s, and we put a VegaTrem on it there, too"

guitars to stand out, so building a rig is a challenge. My main goal is to build Joe a rig that allows the essence of his guitar collection to shine through, no matter what guitar he chooses — and I've done that."

It's an interesting spot to be in when your job is to dial in the sound of a legend. Especially when said legend is not remotely beholden to anything he's done in the past, no matter how iconic or beloved it might be. It's a balancing act, to say the least.

"When Joe is in soundcheck, he'll ask me, 'How does the rig sound?,' and if I give him the thumbs up, we ride the gauntlet. But depending on where he's leaning, I'll change the rig — sometimes pretty damn significantly — because he's always looking for something new. Lately, with the Hollywood Vampires, Joe has been going with the Marshall JCM100, the TS9 and a Klon Centaur. He has an original Klon that he picked up with Brad [*Whitford*] in the Nineties — but I don't keep that on his board. When we tour with Aerosmith, I might have the original there, but while on the road with the Vampires, too many people at these festivals could swipe it. So I've been going with what I feel is the best reproduction on the market today, the Warm Audio Centavo [*WA-CV*]."

When asked if there's a piece of gear that Perry explicitly doesn't like or has banned from his rig, Hurst says, "The cool thing about Joe is that he's open to anything. Our rule is, 'Let's try it. If it doesn't work, we don't do it again.' You never know if something new will be right for all situations, but Joe is open to pretty much anything, including building new rigs from the ground up, which is inspiring and fun."

When most of us think of Joe Perry, the lasting impression in our minds tends to skew toward a select few guitars, such as his '59 Les Paul or his beloved "Burned Strat." Hurst, however, has a different take: "For me, it's the 10-string B.C. Rich Bich. I don't know what it is, but something happens to Joe when he picks up that guitar. It's featured in the photos for the *Live! Bootleg* record, I think, and I had that poster on my wall as a kid. When Joe straps on that guitar, something special happens."

Thinking about other favorites, Hurst continues, "The Frankenstein [*Burned*] Strat with the upside-down headstock is another special guitar. It's got a Tele neck and two P90s, and we put a VegaTrem on it there, too. I moved the volume control for Joe, who seems very comfortable with it. There have been nights that, apart from maybe grabbing a Gretsch or something, he plays nearly the whole show with it. It's become iconic, but that's subject to change if you know Joe. He loves to switch it up, and that's why I love working for him." GW

the notes right, but that's not at all how I played it." We both laughed at that; then he showed me the "correct" way they were played. Thanks, Joe!

VINNIE MOORE

There are so many Aerosmith moments that I could mention, but "Last Child" is one of my all-time favorites. Everything about that song is killer. The main guitar riff is so badass. When I was a kid, I wished I could play it and would [*play*] air guitar while listening. Just love the groove of this song. The middle solo starts with two notes played in half steps and is totally catchy and memorable. Some cool licks follow, and then a catchy little harmony part. I think it's great that you can hear the pick hitting the strings on many of the notes. It sounds so raw. The guitar licks during the fade-out are great as well. Love all the guitar and the whole song in general. When I hear it, I am transported right back to being a kid who was hungry to get better at guitar.

ZAKK WYLDE

Joe Perry and Brad Whitford are one of the greatest guitar duos of all time for a batch of reasons! Their writing, performances and production on those early Aerosmith albums alone are hall-of-fame-worthy! Although "Dream On" is a piano song, the guitar composition and performance are truly amazing. It never ceases to amaze me how brilliant and timeless the guitar intro (before the vocals start) is.

STEVE BROWN
(TRIXTER)

There are way too many, but my favorite is a little bit different... it comes off *Permanent Vacation* after they got sober and took off again. I've always loved "Magic Touch" by Joe and Steven. This song means a lot to me because it's when I first heard Aerosmith getting into Eighties mode. It's got great melodies along with classic Aerosmith. It's unmistakably Aerosmith, but it sounded new and fresh. Joe's riffs are awesome; if I dare say, Joe Perry is almost shredding. It's got scale work and phrasing that I'd never heard him do before. It's a perfect example of them taking over the world again as arena rockers. I love it.

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Rising Star

BLACKSTAR DEBUT 50R **By Chris Gill**

BLACKSTAR HAS ENJOYED incredible growth since its beginnings 16 years ago, with the company now offering a staggering variety of amps for electric, acoustic and bass guitars ranging from tiny battery-powered units to mammoth high-power tube stacks for the stage. While the variety is impressive, even more astonishing is the consistency of the sound quality of each product throughout the entire lineup. This is particularly evident on Blackstar's new Debut 50R solid-state combo, which should drive the final nail into the coffin of biases that claim a solid-state technology can't sound as good as tubes.

FEATURES The Blackstar Debut 50R sells for a price comparable to practice or beginner's amp combos, but while it's certainly a great choice for novice players (and one that will give them a competitive advantage from the get-go), seasoned guitarists will want to check it out as well thanks to its great tones and useful features. The Debut 50R is a compact 50-watt, two-channel combo amp with a single 12-inch speaker in an open-back cabinet, and it is available with either cream covering/oxblood speaker cloth or black covering/"biscuit" basketweave speaker cloth cosmetics. Blackstar's refined MOSFET preamp

design delivers tube-like tone and dynamic feel, with even the most distorted overdrive tones cleaning up when the guitar's volume is backed down.

Two channels (Clean and Overdrive) keep operation simple, while Clean Volume, Overdrive Gain, Overdrive Volume, Bass, Middle, Treble, Blackstar's patented ISF (Infinite Shape Feature) tone and Reverb knobs plus Clean Bright, Hall/Plate Reverb and 50-watt/5-watt Power Reduction switches provide plenty of tone and texture shaping flexibility. Rear panel jacks include a ¼-inch Line Out/Headphone jacks, ¼-inch jack for an optional two-button footswitch controller to engage clean/overdrive and reverb on/off, 1/8-inch line input and mono effects loop with ¼-inch send and return jacks.

PERFORMANCE Whereas most competitors' amps in the Blackstar Debut 50R's price range are loaded with features like dozens of modeled tones, drum and musical accompaniment patterns and multi-effects, the Debut 50R is focused on providing stellar tone and essential, useful features for recording, performing and practice applications. The 50-watt amp provides volume output that is loud enough for most club gigs (or bigger venues when miked or fed directly to a mixing console). An external speaker jack is missing but not entirely necessary as the amp is more than loud enough on its own.

The volume, gain and EQ sections are straightforward, making it easy for even novices to quickly dial in desired tones. Like on other Blackstar amps, the ISF control is the key to creating an impressive variety of tones thanks to its interaction with the standard bass, middle and treble controls. From American-style clean and overdrive tones with slightly scooped mids to the classic rock bark and growl of British-style distortion and even decent scooped midrange metal tones, the Debut 50R covers a wide range of tones that should satisfy most players. The hall and plate reverbs provide lush depth and ambience without decreasing the overall clarity and definition of the basic tones. Clean tones with a touch of reverb are particularly stunning, with a crystalline sparkle uncommon on amps in this price range.

The power reduction switch is a very useful tool for recording as it allows the amp to output tones with the character and dynamic responsiveness of a hard-working amp at volume levels that won't overwhelm a mic. The line out/headphone jack features speaker emulation, which makes it a great option for direct recording. The combo also works exceptionally well with pedals plugged into its single input as well as outboard processors connected to its effects loop, making it a great base platform for players who use a lot of effects.

Weighing less than 20 pounds, the Blackstar Debut 50R is particularly attractive to guitarists who want to minimize the weight of their live rigs. It's compact and affordable enough to provide an excellent backup solution to a larger rig, and its impressive variety of classic tones makes it a great choice for players seeking a gig-worthy amp that they can stash in a commercial jet's overhead luggage bin. With a price lower than most boutique pedals, the Debut 50R delivers possibly the best bang-for-the-buck of any combo amp on today's market.

CHEAT SHEET

STREET PRICE
$249.99
MANUFACTURER
Blackstar Amplification, blackstaramps.com

- Blackstar's patented ISF tone control enables users to dial in a surprisingly wide variety of tones for any style of music.
- The two-channel design keeps things simple by providing outstanding clean (with bright switch) and overdrive textures that truly resemble a tube amp.
- The reverb effect provides selectable hall and plate settings, and the effect can be engaged with an optional footswitch controller.
- The 50-watt/5-watt power reduction switch lets users enjoy the dynamics and tonal qualities of a fully driven amp at volume levels ideal for recording and practice.
- **THE BOTTOM LINE**
With its no-nonsense design that prioritizes sound quality, sound-shaping flexibility, volume output and affordability, the Blackstar Debut 50R is a great choice for beginners on a budget as well as experienced guitarists looking for a great-sounding portable rig.

Be My Valentine

STERLING BY MUSIC MAN VALENTINE CHAMBERED BIGSBY

By Paul Riario

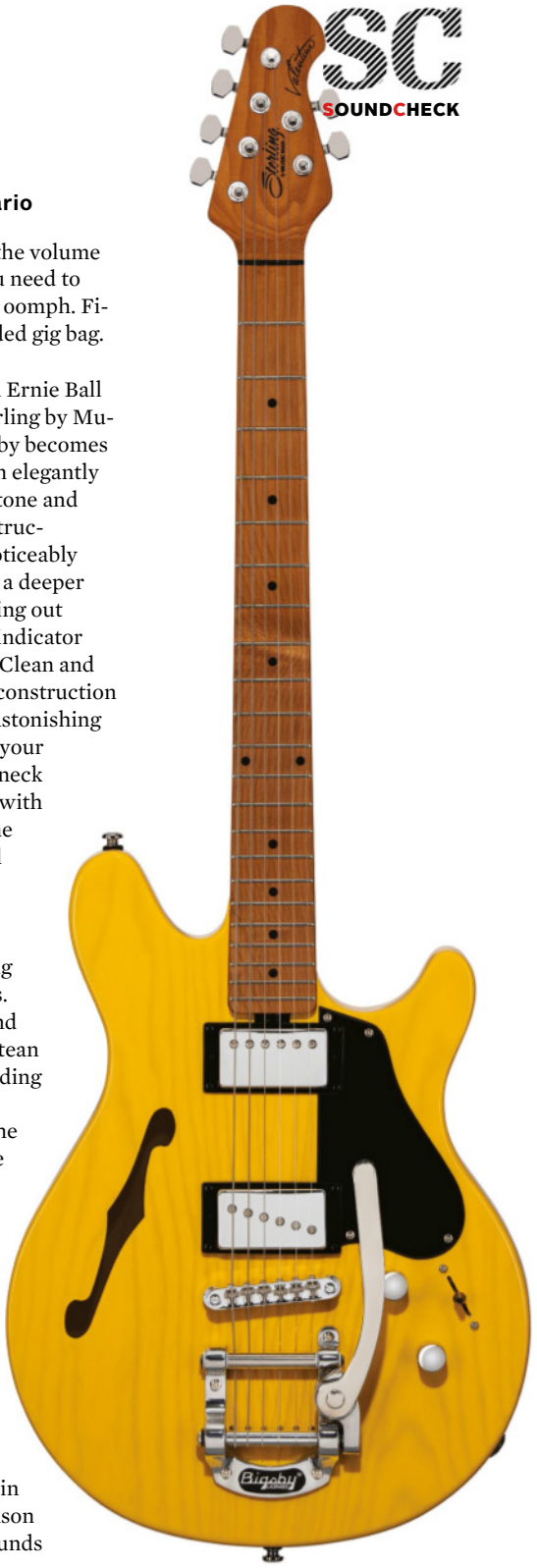
I'M PRETTY SURE signature guitars have outpaced most standard production models. After all, an artist's collaborative input often brings into focus a nouveau guitar that might offer a refreshing update or integrate timeless looks and modern features, with the potential to surpass anything that came before it. With that, there's no point arguing with the fact that Sterling by Music Man's new Valentine Chambered Bigsby guitar encapsulates both of the latter views; however, I also believe the brand's Valentine collection has somehow flown under the radar for most players considering an artist model. And that's a shame because I always felt the Valentine is a beautiful offset design that paired the stripped-down nature of a Tele with the diminutive shape of an ES-339. Still, now, with the Valentine Chambered Bigsby, this revitalized signature guitar has graduated to an unforgettable musical instrument that's more compelling than ever with its inclusion of a Bigsby vibrato and a chambered body with an F-hole.

FEATURES Although the Valentine Chambered Bigsby is the fourth addition to Sterling by Music Man's Valentine artist series collection, it stays true to the original specs that made it noteworthy while elevating its features with a custom-chambered body design and an angled Tune-o-matic bridge with a Bigsby B50 vibrato to dig on a completely new set of tones. The guitar features a white ash body in a gorgeous butterscotch finish along with a classic F-hole and black pickguard. Completing its eye-catching appearance is a roasted maple neck and fingerboard that also maintains resistance to temperature and humidity changes while adding unparalleled stability. There are also 22 narrow jumbo frets, a super-flat 12-inch fingerboard radius for buzz-free bends, steadfast locking tuners and a handy and conveniently placed heel-adjust truss rod nut.

The Sterling by Music Man Designed pickups are a versatile combo configuration of a neck humbucker and a Tele-voiced single coil bridge pickup (cleverly presented as a covered humbucker) that'll provide a bright, snappy response. The neck humbucker will yield warm and fuller tones, all of which are easily accessed by its three-position blade switch. What's more, an active 12dB push-push boost circuit at the volume knob increases your output when you need to stand out for soloing or to add a little oomph. Finally, the guitar comes with an included gig bag.

PERFORMANCE Since there isn't an Ernie Ball Music Man counterpart to it, the Sterling by Music Man's Valentine Chambered Bigsby becomes all the more *the* enticing choice for an elegantly understated guitar with exceptional tone and playability. With its chambered construction and F-hole, this Valentine is a noticeably lighter-weight instrument that emits a deeper resonance and woodier tone as you ring out chords acoustically, which is a great indicator of what it will sound like plugged in. Clean and tidy pretty much sums up its overall construction from top to bottom, and frankly, it's astonishing how well this guitar feels once it's in your hands. The rounded C-shape profile neck is precisely crafted and comfortable, with a low-action string setup that is on the money. The Bigsby vibrato is an ideal inclusion for this Valentine model — adding another level of nuanced expression with its gentle wavering throw, while also coaxing a steely ring to the guitar's semi-hollow overtones.

Tone-wise, I find the single-coil and humbucker configuration to be a protean pairing for the Valentine's genre-bending leanings — as long as you're not dabbling in the aggressive metal zone. The single-coil bridge has all the requisite slice and snap of a Tele-voiced pickup for more rock and country styles, with a blazing top end that kicks in once you activate the 12db boost. And if you need to tame the beast, the neck humbucker balances the roar of the bridge with a rounder and much warmer output for softer lead passages, clean runs and jazzy stylings. The beauty of the Valentine is its chameleon-like utility, and factoring in its affordability, there's very little reason not to have a guitar that looks and sounds like nothing else.



CHEAT SHEET

STREET PRICE: $849.99
MANUFACTURER: Sterling by Music Man, sterling-bymusicman.com

- Featuring a custom-chambered body, roasted maple neck and fingerboard, Bigsby B50 vibrato and a classic F-hole, the guitar is an all-new Valentine design.
- The Valentine Chambered Bigsby comes loaded with a powerful single-coil bridge pickup and neck humbucker and an active 12dB push-push boost circuit.
- **THE BOTTOM LINE** The Valentine Chambered Bigsby presents itself as a fantastic alternative to other traditional guitars by combining innovative features and modern electronics that make it a standout classic that'll cover most styles from jazz to rock.

Golden Wings

PRS MODERN EAGLE V

By Chris Gill

STARTING PRICE: $4,950 (prices vary based on finish options)
MANUFACTURER:
PRS Guitars, prsguitars.com

- The pair of TCI dual-coil bridge and neck pickups plus NS-01 single-coil in the center to provide a full-range of classic dual humbucker and triple single-coil tones and beyond.
- A pair of mini coil-split toggles plus a push/pull tone knob that engages both humbuckers simultaneously provide access to 17 different tones via the five-way blade switch.
- With the same original controls as the vintage pedal, the Mutation Phasor II delivers chewy and ultra-swirly phasing in a road-worthy build.
- **THE BOTTOM LINE**
The PRS Modern Eagle V is one of the most pricey additions to the PRS Core lineup, but its pickup and wiring configuration along with its world-class tone woods and construction could very well make it the only guitar a discriminating player will ever need.

ONE OF THE tougher decisions guitarists face is whether they should save up to buy the best instrument they can afford or spend that money on a variety of less expensive guitars to enjoy a broader range of tones. The PRS Modern Eagle V, which PRS recently added to its Core lineup, offers a tantalizing third option, which is — why not get a supremely well-crafted high-end guitar that provides an incredibly versatile variety of world-class tones from a single instrument? Previously only offered via custom order from the PRS Private Stock and Wood Library programs, the Modern Eagle V is freshly available at a reduced price, which will allow more players to enjoy its ingenious humbucker/single-coil setup that covers the all the bases for the most desirable tones, and then some.

FEATURES The Modern Eagle V starts with the classic PRS asymmetrical double-cutaway body with comfortable cutaway and belly contours and a violin top carve. The guitar is built from the classic tone wood formula of a flame maple top over a lightweight mahogany body and a one-piece set mahogany neck with rosewood fretboard, all crafted from ultra-high-quality materials. Neck features include 22 medium jumbo nickel silver frets, 25-inch scale length, Pattern neck profile, 10-inch radius and mother-of-pearl Birds inlays.

Newer refinements include the patented PRS Gen III tremolo with a heavy brass block and brass saddles and PRS Phase III locking tuners with open gears. The Modern Eagle V's most notable features are its pickup configuration and wiring, which provide access to an incredibly wide range of classic tones in an intuitive manner that enables guitarists to instantly access desired settings on stage. The pickups consist of a pair of PRS TCI humbuckers at the neck and bridge positions, which are actually pairs of true single-coil pickups that can be paired or split via a set of mini toggle switches. A PRS NS-01 single-pickup is located in the center, and a five-position blade switch engages traditional bridge, bridge + middle, middle, neck + middle and neck settings. Controls consist of a master volume and master tone knob, the latter providing a major twist that further expands the Modern Eagle V's versatility. By pulling up on the Tone knob, both humbuckers are engaged, which provides both the classic dual-humbucker middle setting at positions one and five with four voice options thanks to each pickup's coil splitting capabilities as well an additional four voice options at positions two, three and four where all three pickups are engaged simultaneously (with each pickup's coil splitting altering the tones). That results in a total of 17 different pickup voices that encompass traditional dual-humbucker/3-way switch, triple single-coil/five-way switch, HSS and HSH tones and several other distinctive settings.

PERFORMANCE Many guitars today offer coil-splitting capabilities, but often the single-coil tones don't sound as good as dedicated single-coil guitars and the volume levels between humbucking and single-coil settings don't match. The Modern Eagle V suffers from none of these ailments. The dual-coil settings have the powerful mids, roar and singing sustain of first-class humbuckers, while the single-coils deliver bite, body and harmonic complexity along with that distinctive midrange quack when combined. The mini switches engage the coils closest to the neck on each dual-coil pickup. In a nutshell, the Modern Eagle V delivers the entire range of authentic Les Paul and Strat-style tones from a single instrument and then some.

Construction, attention to detail, materials and playability are everything one expects from a high-end PRS guitar—simply immaculate. The standard PRS 25-inch scale length works particularly well here, providing just enough tension for Strat-like twang and slinky bends and beefy bass that characterize the LP experience.

Buzz Bin

Electro-Harmonix Andy Summers Walking on the Moon Flanger

NO OTHER GUITARIST has been more associated with the unmistakable sound of the chorus effect than Andy Summers, guitar emeritus of the legendary band the Police. The glaring irony, of course, is that Summers actually used a flanger — specifically, an Electro-Harmonix Electric Mistress — to create those shimmering chorus textures on hits like "Walking on the Moon" and "Message in a Bottle" in the band's early years. Obviously, taming the swooshy flange required Summers to dial back certain knobs on that vintage pedal to achieve his heavily chorused guitar sound. Even the man himself admits, "A big part of my guitar sound at that time in the Police was the flange sound, which we have here today in this great new pedal." But figuratively speaking, many experienced players like Summers already knew that chorus and flanger are more akin to close relatives than distant cousins, and have been able to manipulate a flanger to conjure the heavy sweep or swirl of either effect. Now that the cat is out of the bag, you can summon both of those related effects — along with the ability to nail Summers' iconic tones — with the Electro-Harmonix Andy Summers Walking on the Moon Flanger.

More of a commemorative tribute than a collaboration, the Walking on the Moon artist edition analog flanger is a near-sonic recreation of an original Deluxe Electric Mistress stompbox. It has the same topology but has been shrunken down into a compact die-cast chassis (which, coincidentally, is the same as EHX's discontinued Deluxe Electric Mistress). The faithful control set of Rate, Range and Color are preserved, as well as a Filter Matrix switch that suspends the LFO from the flanger circuit, just like the original pedal. There are also jacks for Input, Flanged Out for the wet effect and Dry Out to split your signal from the affected signal. The pedal has true bypass switching and includes a 9V adapter while also being able to be powered by a 9V battery. You'll see that Summers' signature graces the face of the pedal, and a tribute Walking on the Moon poster with art by Laura Josephson is included inside the box.

For many who are not familiar with the WOTM's control set, you'll find the Color knob ramps up the intensity of the flanger effect as you move it clockwise, while Range manages how narrow or wide the sweep of the flanger reacts with the bass frequencies. The Rate, naturally, increases or decreases the speed of the flanged modulation, where higher settings create a fluttering vibrato. I found keeping the Color and Range below the 10 o'clock position with the Rate just before noon got me close to Summers' signature chorused sounds with a hint of flange. As you turn up the Color and Range, the flanging metamorphoses into a thick jet-like swoosh similar to a tape flange, while dialing them back encourages a juicier flange with lush chorusing. Engaging the Filter Matrix switch (which halts the LFO of the flanger circuit) opens the pedal up to a host of alternative filtered tones where you can usher in metallic and boxy-sounding ring modulations. Regardless of the fact that the WOTM is essentially a dressed-up Deluxe Electric Mistress, let's not forget that it's a wonderfully big and lively flanger that spikes its chorusing in a lilting manner. It's no wonder why Summers embraced it as his sound.

— Paul Riario

STREET PRICE: $129
MANUFACTURER: Electro-Harmonix, ehx.com

Eric Krasno with his new D'Angelico Deluxe Brighton signature model

Just Right

D'ANGELICO DELUXE ERIC KRASNO BRIGHTON By Chris Gill

MOST GUITARISTS WITH insatiable appetites for gear reach a point where it's difficult to find a new guitar with a truly distinctive voice. Sure, every guitar has its own sound, but even experienced players can find the differences between models made of similar woods and with identical pickup configurations very subtle. Eric Krasno (Soulive, Lettuce, Tedeschi-Trucks Band, Norah Jones) had reached a similar crossroads, so when he collaborated with D'Angelico on his signature Deluxe Eric Krasno Brighton solidbody electric his goal was to develop an instrument that provided "all of the right elements combined together." The end result is a guitar with a unique, attractive and expressive voice, and since it's limited to only 50 units it's worth a look by any player who wants to stand out from the crowd.

FEATURES Whereas many artist signature guitars based on a current model usually only offer slight changes like different pickups or custom finishes, the D'Angelico Deluxe Eric Krasno Brighton differs quite significantly from D'Angelico's regular Deluxe Brighton model but without sacrificing the general vibe. The most notable feature is the pair of custom Seymour Duncan "Strat in humbucker" single-coil pickups, which are only available on this model. The bridge pickup has Alnico V magnets, while the neck pickup has Alnico II magnets and reverse wind/reverse phase wiring to provide true noise-canceling humbucking performance when both pickups are engaged. Instead of individual volume and tone controls for each pickup, the Krasno has master volume and tone knobs with 250k pots instead of 500k. Other major differences include a rosewood fingerboard with 12-inch radius (instead of ebony 14-inch), a custom C-shape profile, a fully swamp ash body (instead of the Deluxe's flame maple top) and gold hardware instead of nickel.

Other notable features include the three-piece set-thru neck with 24.75-inch scale length and 22 Jescar 47/104 frets, double cutaway body shape with slim 1.625-inch depth, Tune-O-Matic bridge with stopbar tailpiece and three-way pickup selector toggle.

PERFORMANCE Thanks to the very distinctive tonal personality of the Duncan "Strat in humbucker" pickups along with the swamp ash body and 24.75-inch scale, the Deluxe Eric Krasno Brighton hits a magical "goldilocks" spot between a vintage Les Paul Special and Stratocaster. The pickups' tones are like the biggest, sweetest Strat or a Les Paul Special with more brilliance and sparkle. The tones are very expressive and dynamic, with the low notes delivering a punchy spank, treble notes providing bell-like, crystal-clear snap while the midrange and overall voice offers more than ample meat on the bone for body and sustain. The craftsmanship and attention to detail are impeccable, and the playability is as comfortable as a well-worn pair of fitted jeans. Considering the very limited production, you'll want to move fast if these features sound just right for you.

CHEAT SHEET

LIST PRICE: $2,299.99
MANUFACTURER: D'Angelico Guitars, dangelicoguitars.com

- Custom Seymour Duncan "Strat in humbucker" single-coils with Alnico V (bridge) and Alnico II (neck) magnets deliver magical tones between a Strat and P90.
- The extremely comfortable neck has a custom C-shaped profile, 24.75-inch scale, 22 Jescar 47/104 frets and a rosewood fingerboard.
- **THE BOTTOM LINE**
  If you're burned out by the usual dual-humbucker, dual-P90, Strat and Tele guitars and/or are looking for the ultimate "goldilocks" tone that falls somewhere in between, the D'Angelico Deluxe Eric Krasno Brighton is certain to meet most players' discriminating needs.

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IN DEEP

by Andy Aledort

For video of this lesson, go to guitarworld.com/december2023

GOTTA BOOGIE

How to play, "Sam's Boogie," redux, part 1

ONE OF THE greatest Chicago blues guitarists ever is Samuel Gene Maghett, AKA "Magic Sam." Maghett moved from Grenada County, Mississippi to Chicago in 1956 and began recording singles for Cobra Records, the first of which was 1957's "All Your Love." Sam signed with Delmark Records in 1967 to release his first LP, *West Side Soul*, often cited as the template for modern blues. Tragically, Sam would pass away of a heart attack at the age of 32 in late 1969.

Among the many fantastic tracks on *West Side Soul* is "Lookin' Good," an instrumental tune with a tricky signature lick. Sam expanded on "Lookin' Good" for his high-octane rendition at the 1969 Ann Arbor Blues Festival, dubbed "Sam's Boogie."

The "Lookin' Good/Sam's Boogie" lick is built on a uniquely difficult pick-hand technique. **FIGURE 1** presents a repeating one-bar lick along these lines, written in $\frac{4}{4}$ time as straight 16th notes. The "feel" of the tune is "cut time," or $\frac{2}{4}$ meter, with eighth notes feeling like 16ths in $\frac{4}{4}$. Written as 16th notes, it's easier to see the shape of each figure as it falls on each beat.

Through beats 1 and 2, with the index finger barring an A chord shape on the D, G and B strings at the 2nd fret, an F♯ note on the D string's 4th fret and a C on the 3rd fret of the A string are added and removed as the lick progresses. On beats 3 and 4, a single-note melody is added on the barred strings.

Fingerpicking is essential for the performance of this pattern. Alternate between picking with your thumb and index finger, as indicated by "p" and "i," respectively. On the first two beats, the thumb picks the notes on the A and D strings while the index finger picks those on the G string. The thumb and index finger then alternate.

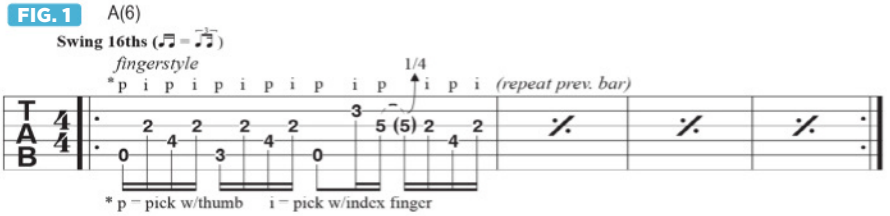
FIGURES 2 and **3** illustrate the primary lick that falls across beats 1 and 2, written here as eighth notes. As shown in **FIGURE 3**, the initial notes on beats 1 and 2 switch from an open A to a fretted C.

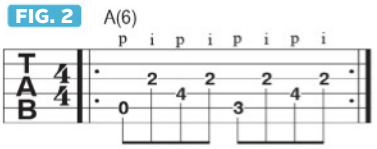
FIGURE 4 breaks down the lick that falls on beats 3 and 4. A primarily descending phrase — D, C, A, F♯, A — is followed by a restatement of the entire phrase in bars 2 and 3. **FIGURE 5** shows this lick in eighth notes.

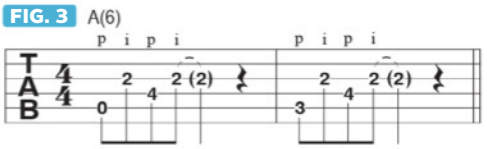
Another element in the unique quality of this lick is the way Sam's pick-hand hit the strings; he would drag, or rake, his thumb and index finger across them, as shown in **FIGURE 6**, emulating the sound of thimbles on a washboard.

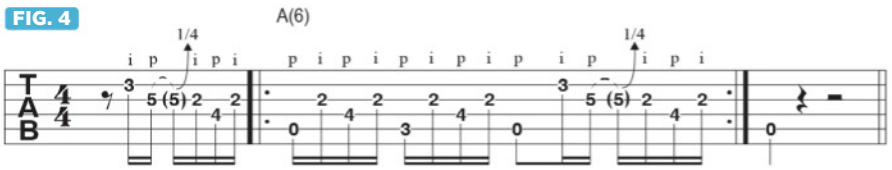
As shown in **FIGURE 7**, the C note on the A string is occasionally substituted for the low G note at the same fret on the 6th string, providing additional variation and interest to the riff.

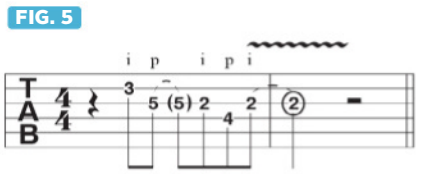
At the 0:53 point of the recording, the band lays out and Sam plays unaccompanied. **FIGURE 8** depicts a lick along the lines of his first phrase, similarly based on a simple descending melody played against the repeating bass patterns. In **FIGURE 9**, the idea is expanded to a more complex lick, built from an A7 voicing and played in a rhythm of straight 16th notes.

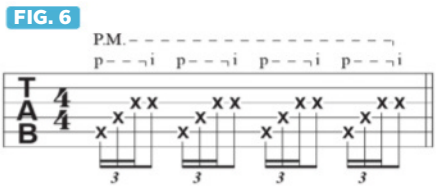
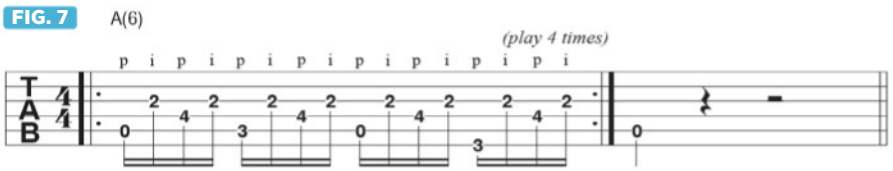


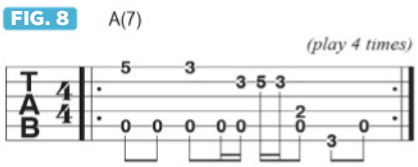


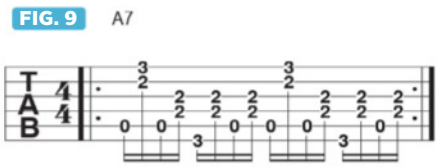












***GW* associate editor Andy Aledort's latest album, *Light of Love*, is available now.**

ALISON HASBACH

TALES FROM NERDVILLE

by Joe Bonamassa

For video of this lesson, go to guitarworld.com/december2023

TOOLS OF THE TRADE, PART 8

Famous Amos: The 1958 Gibson Flying V

TODAY, I'D LIKE to discuss "Famous Amos," an infamous 1958 Gibson Flying V. This guitar originally shipped from Gibson on May 28, 1958, to Arthur's Music Store in Indianapolis. Sometime around 1959/1960, it was sold to a guy named Pete Mitchell, who was the guitar player for country music star Ernest Tubb. In 1965, Mitchell traded this Flying V for a Gretsch Country Gentleman. I don't suggest doing that now! But that is what happened back in 1965.

In 1971 or '72, Norm Harris from Norman's Rare Guitars in Tarzana, California, purchased the guitar, so there's a six- or seven-year blank spot in the guitar's history. The V sat in Norm's secret stash until 2015, when he was kind enough to sell it to me.

"Famous Amos" is an historic guitar, but not because of my association with it. There's a provenance to this guitar, and I suggest that you do an Internet search on "Amos Flying V." You'll no doubt come across a picture of Amos Arthur, the proprietor of Arthur's Music Store, holding the guitar in 1958 and seemingly thinking, "What the hell did they just ship me, and how am I going to get $275 for it?!"

FIGURE 1 features a four-bar example with the toggle switch set on the neck pickup. The tone is fat and warm but with loads of bite that would slice through any mix. This is due to the Korina body, along with the incredible sound of the original PAF (patent applied for) pickups.

In bars 1 and 2, I'm picking with my fingers, *à la* Albert King, the legendary blues master known for his use of a Flying V. In bars 3 and 4, I switch to using the pick to play the faster alternate-picked phrases. These licks are played with a $\frac{12}{8}$ feel in a slow-blues style, and in the key of B, with phrases based on the B blues scale (B, D, E, F♯, A). I begin in 10th position and then shift down to 7th position in bar 2 before moving back up in 10th position.

In **FIGURE 2**, I engage both pickups, with all dials set on 10. The tone is still exceptionally fat but with more cut and clarity, provided by the bridge pickup. The phrase in bar 1 is played in the style of B.B. King and is based on the B major pentatonic scale (B, C♯, D♯, F♯, G♯).

FIG. 1 neck pickup (B7)

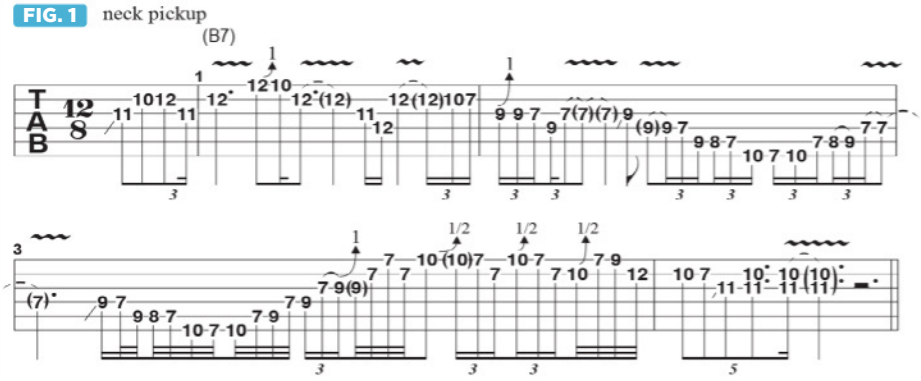


FIG. 2 both pickups (B7)

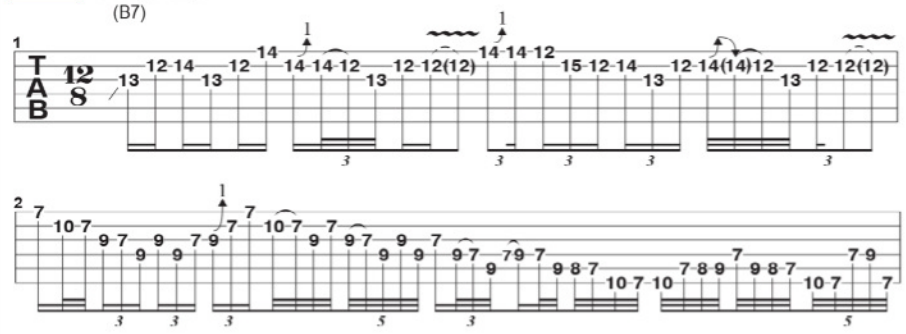
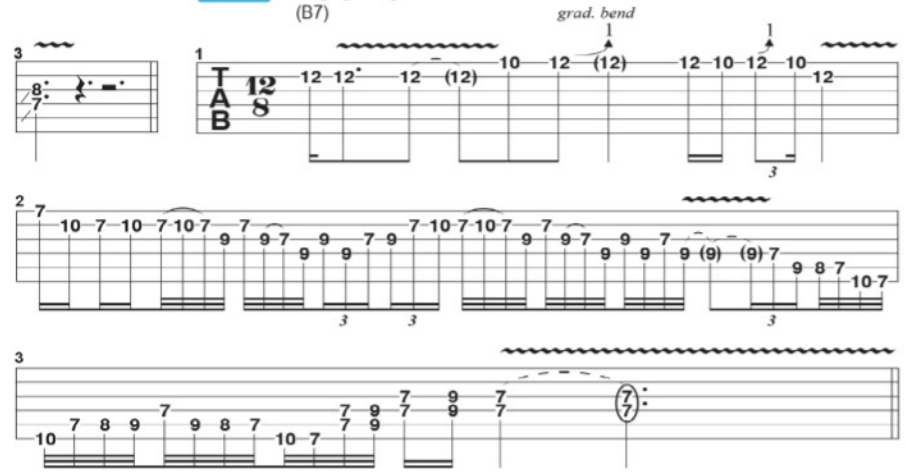


FIG. 3 bridge pickup (B7)



In **FIGURE 3**, I switch to the bridge pickup and play more phrases based on the B blues scale, leaning more towards the styles of Gary Moore and Cream-era Eric Clapton.

Imagine trying to convince your parents to buy you this thing in 1958! That was not happening for most aspiring guitar players at the time. That year, they only sold about 100 of these instruments; the Gibson logs on the manufacture of the 1958 Flying V says they only made 81 of them, but there were probably closer to 100 built and shipped. And I have the original case too, which is the hardest thing to find when it comes to these late-Fifties V's!

Joe Bonamassa is one of the world's most popular blues-rock guitarists — not to mention a top producer and *de facto* ambassador of the blues.

JEFF FASANO

MELODIC MUSE

by Andy Timmons

For video of this lesson, go to guitarworld.com/december2023

OPEN MIND

Incorporating open strings into a riff, and how to play "Winterland," part 2

LAST MONTH, WE looked at the intro to "Winterland," which is a tune I originally recorded for the 2016 Andy Timmons Band album *Theme from a Perfect World*. This month, I'd like to present the guitar parts I play during its instrumental verses.

FIGURE 1 illustrates the 16-bar "Winterland" verse, which I perform unaccompanied in the column's video. Even though this example is not played over a bass-and-drums backing track, the guitar part actually incorporates and conveys the chord progression in a subtle chord-melody style via the inclusion of the root note of each implied chord.

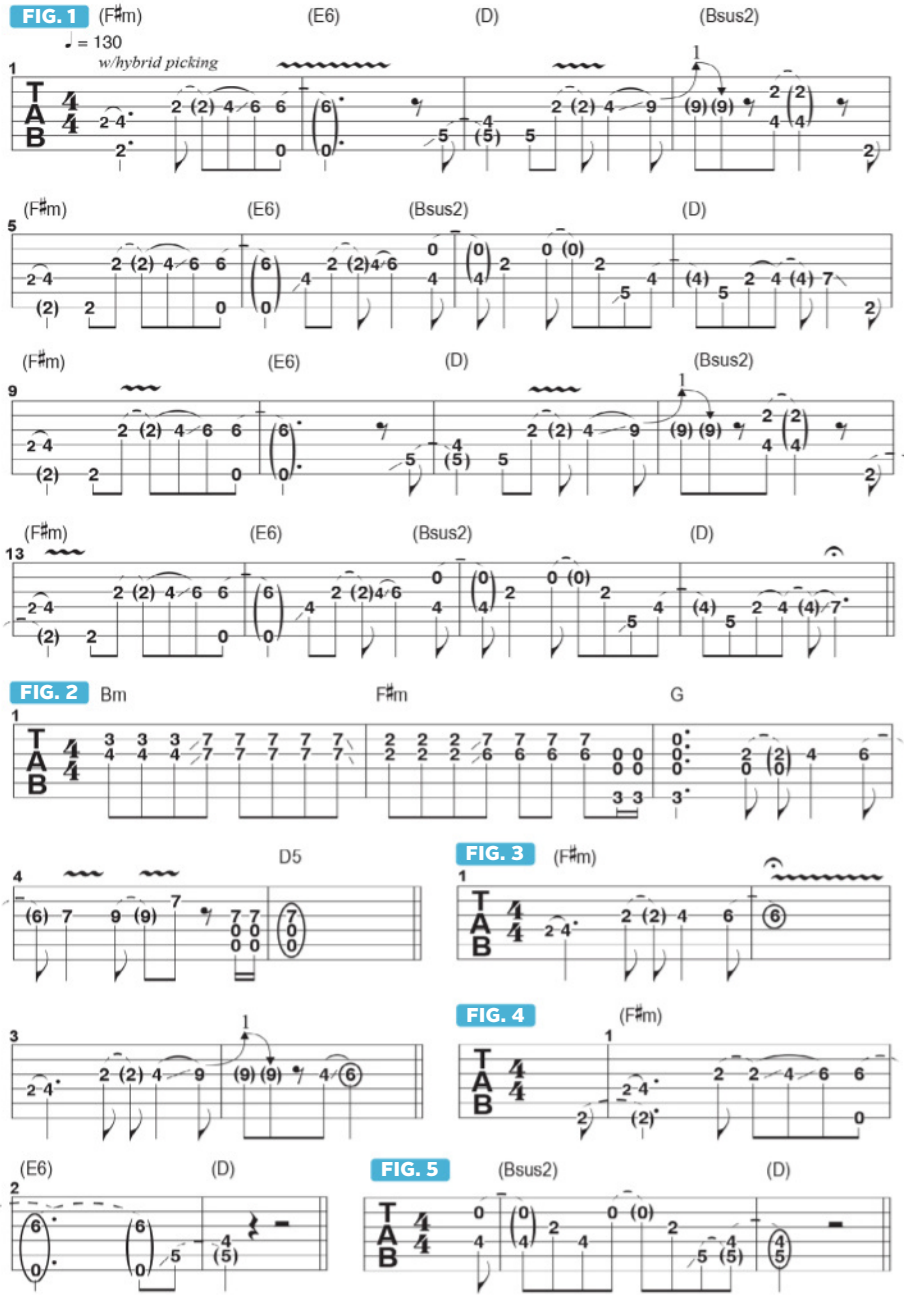
The verse is followed by a short, four-bar "channel" section, shown in **FIGURE 2**. Here, two-note figures on the G and B strings reference a change from Bm to F♯m, followed by a big G chord and accompanying ascending melody in bar 3, which sets up the shift to the tune's chorus with the D chord in bar 5.

Let's first go back and look at how I reference the verse progression throughout **FIGURE 1**. In bar 1, I fret a low F♯ note by wrapping my fret-hand thumb over the top of the neck at the 2nd fret, sounding the root note for the implied F♯m chord. While this low F♯ note rings briefly, I play a melody on the D and G strings. When I slide up to C♯ at the end of bar 1, I drop in an open low E note to reference the chord change from F♯m to E.

At the end of bar 2 into bar 3 of **FIGURE 1**, I play a low D note on the 5th string before moving on to the next phrase. This note provides the necessary harmony to melodically suggest a chord change from E to D.

FIGURE 3 offers a look at this initial four-bar single-note melody without the additional low bass notes that reference the chord progression. Most of the line is performed on the G string, as I slide up and down and apply finger vibrato, to add expressiveness to the melody. In **FIGURE 4**, the bass notes are brought back in, clearly referencing the alluded-to E and D chords.

At the end of bar 3 in **FIGURE 1**, I slide up to an E note and bend it up a whole step to F♯, then release the bend and slide down to a two-note chord of F♯ and C♯ in bar 4. Though no B note is played here, the F♯ functions as the 5th of B, and the C♯ serves as the suspended 2nd, or sus2.



Bars 5-8 represent the "answer" to the melodic line stated in bars 1-4, with a slight twist and resolution offered via a different melody, one that moves down more quickly, landing on the F♯ tonic at the end of bar 7. Notice that the progression now switches from F♯m - E(6) - D - B(sus2) to F♯m - E(6) - B(Sus2) -D, with the last two chords switched. **FIGURE 5** offers a more detailed look this section of the melody.

Next month, we will take a look at the chorus section of "Winterland." See you then.

Andy Timmons is a world-renowned guitarist known for his work with the Andy Timmons Band, Danger Danger and Simon Phillips. His latest album, *Electric Truth*, is out now.

SIMONE CECHETTI

LIVE FROM FLAT V

by Josh Smith

For video of this lesson, go to guitarworld.com/december2023

ALL ANGLES

Combining chromaticism, diminished patterns and ii - V - I's in a solo

OVER THE LAST few months, I've been discussing the three devices I like to use to connect chords when soloing within a blues progression: chromaticism, diminished chords and ii - V - I turnarounds. I offered a lot of different examples of how to use each of these approaches when formulating an improvised solo.

When I'm improvising a solo over a blues progression, however, I don't want to be thinking too much about this stuff, but rather feeling the music and breathing life and emotion into the spontaneous lines. I'm never thinking, "Oh, I need to play a bunch of ii - V - I's now!," or, "This chorus is going to be all about chromaticism." Instead, I'm just following my inner voice and playing what I hear musically, doing my best to connect the dots with all of these ideas together at the same time. Sometimes I don't use any of these approaches; I'll just play "straight" blues phrases because the blues is the greatest thing in the world.

FIGURE 1 presents an improvised solo played over a 12-bar blues in A, utilizing these approaches but without thinking about them too much. Instead, I just followed my creativity. In a general sense, my goal is to anticipate each chord change, which means that, if I'm heading from the I chord, A7, to the IV chord, D7, I'll end my A7 phrase with a few notes that relate to the downbeat of "one" on the D7 chord.

FIGURES 2 to **5** offer a breakdown of a few of the ways in which I'll set up the change from the I chord to the IV. In **FIGURE 2**, I start the solo with a pickup bar. To me, this is a very horn-like line, as I play the notes of an A major triad (A, C♯, E) followed by F♯, and then I land on a high A note on the downbeat of "one" over the initial A7 chord. Notice the use of chromatic slides up to the C♯ and high A notes, which emulate the upward glissando of a horn. In bar 2, I quickly descend with a pull-off from G to E, followed by double-stop dyads (two-note chords) that represent the sound of D/A to A.

FIGURE 3 is a breakdown of what I played in bars 3 and 4 of **FIGURE 1**. After stating the initial line over A7 in bar 1, I end the line with ascending chromatic movement, from E to F to F♯, setting up the change to the IV chord, D7, as F♯ functions as its major 3rd. This is followed by descending chromaticism in the next bar — A, G♯, G, F♯ —which again relates clearly to D7.

In bar 4 of **FIGURE 1**, I also incorporated a diminished idea to set up the IV chord, as shown in **FIGURE 4**. In bar 1, I bring in B♭. When B♭ is substituted for A in an A7 voicing, we get the notes C♯, E, G and B♭, which spell a B♭dim7 chord. In bars 2 and 3, I bring in E♭dim7 (E♭, G♭, A, C) to set up the change back to the I, A7.

At this point, I moved back to playing straight blues licks, as shown in **FIGURE 5**, which ends with a nod toward setting up a ii - V - I substitution of Bm7 - E7 - A7.

Next month, we'll break down the end of the solo and the incorporation of all of the aforementioned approaches.

FIG. 1

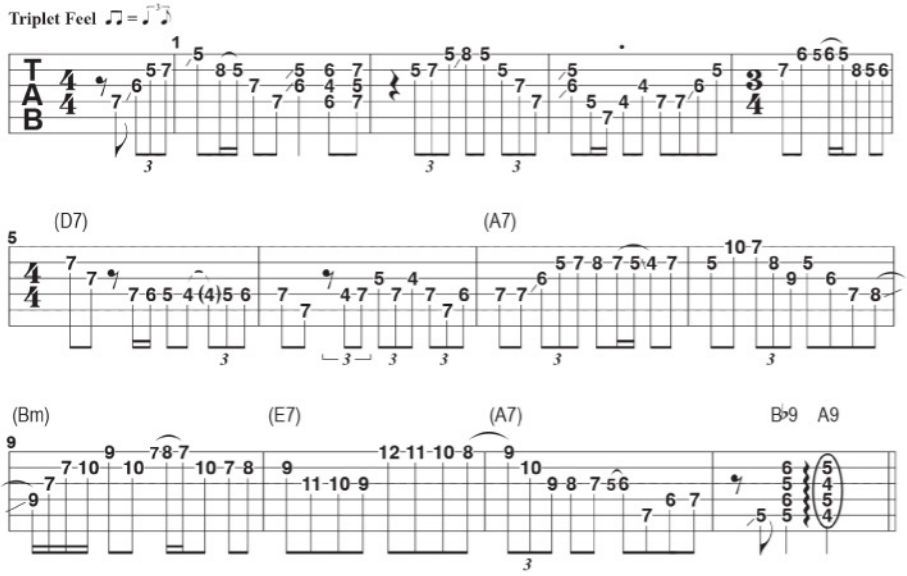


FIG. 2

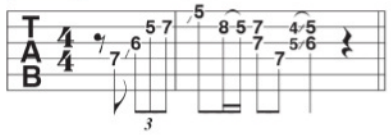


FIG. 3

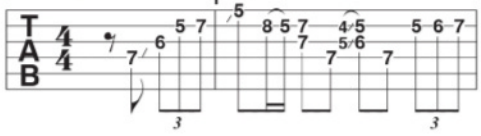


FIG. 4

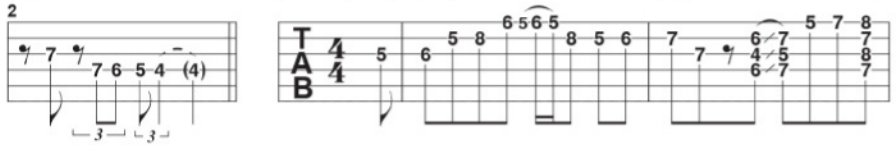
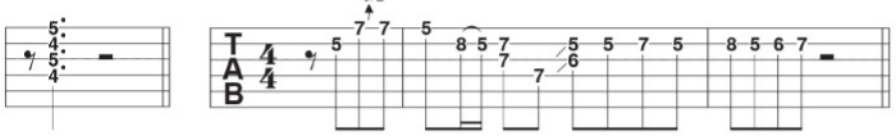


FIG. 5



OLLY CURTIS/FUTURE

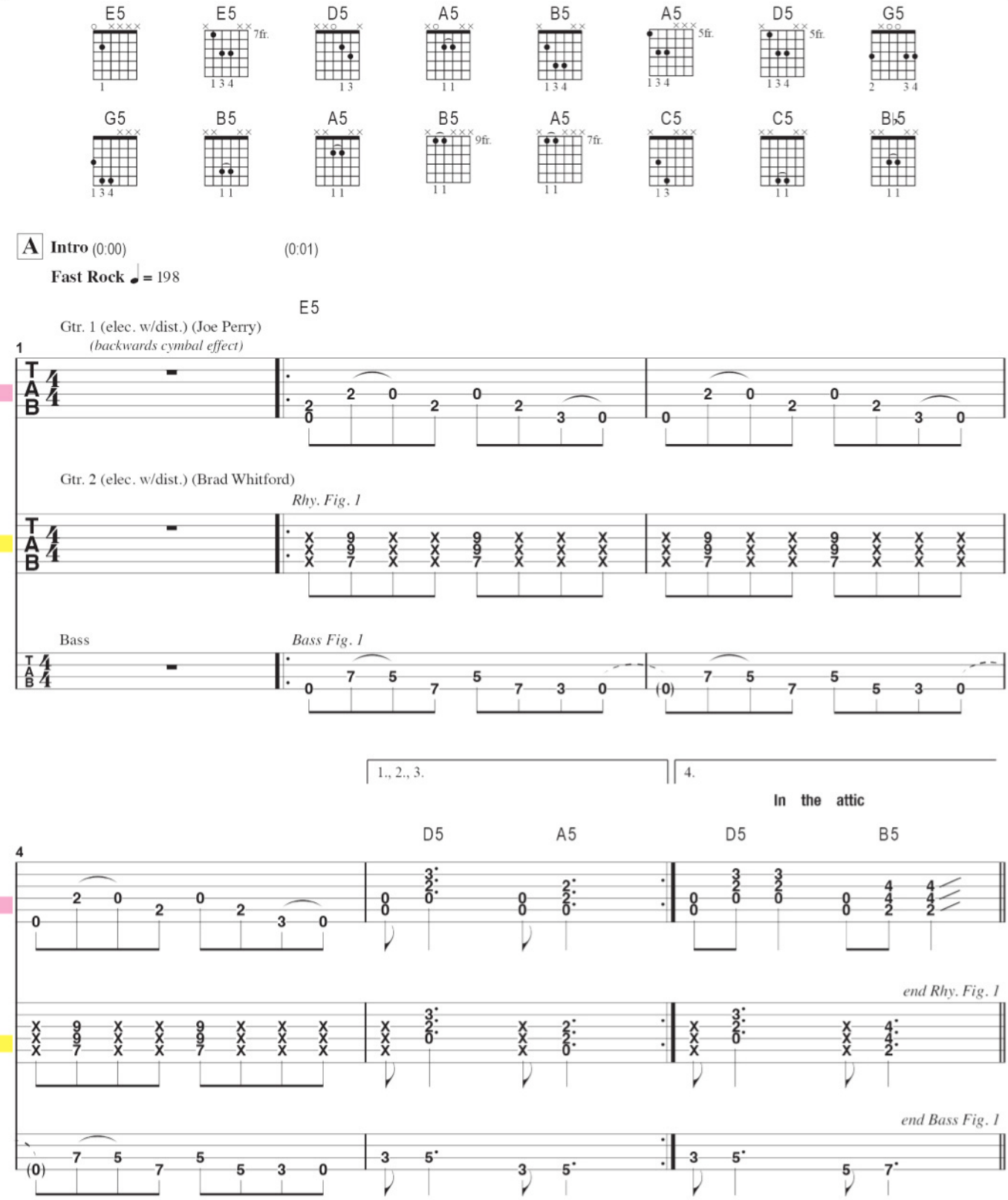
Josh Smith is a highly respected blues-country-jazz master and all-around tone wizard. His new album, 2022's *Bird of Passage*, is out now.

"TOYS IN THE ATTIC"

Aerosmith

As heard on **TOYS IN THE ATTIC**

Words and Music by **STEVEN TYLER** *and* **JOE PERRY** • *Transcribed by* **JEFF PERRIN**



"TOYS IN THE ATTIC"
WORDS AND MUSIC BY STEVEN TYLER AND JOE PERRY.
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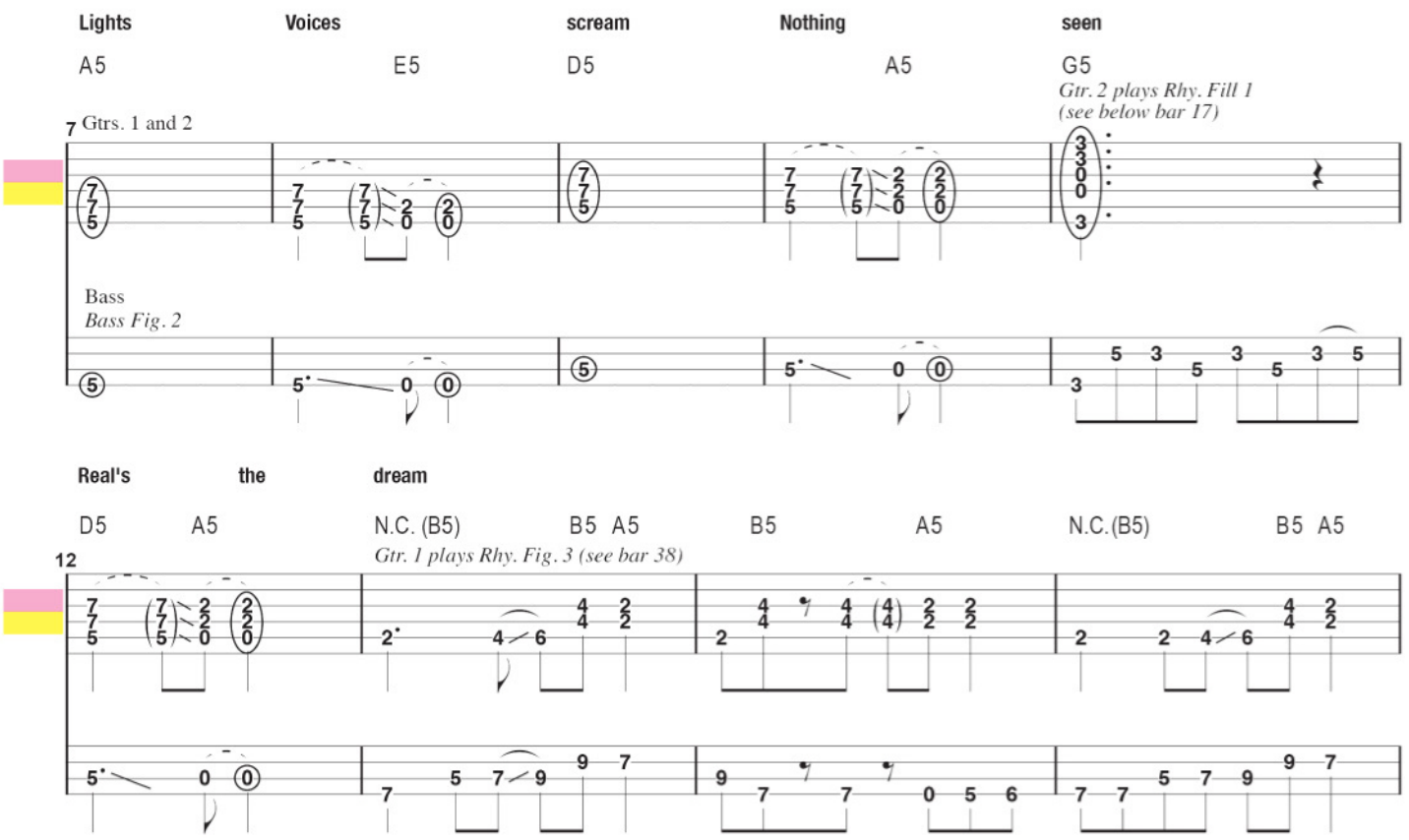
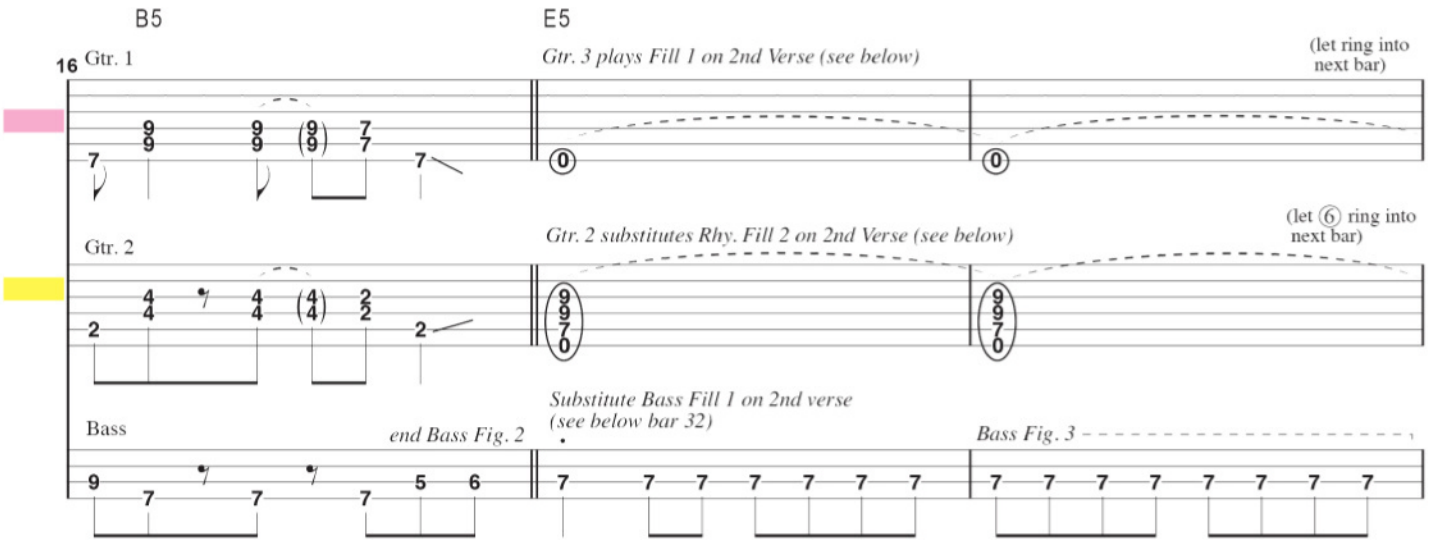
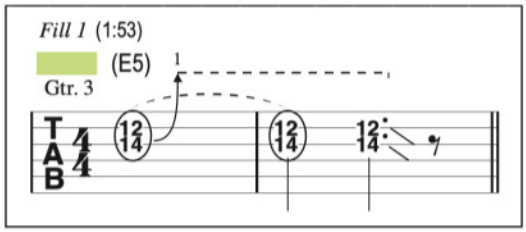
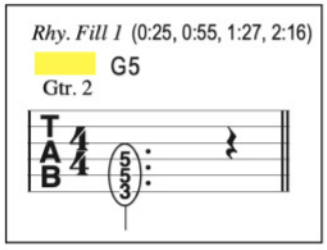
B 1st Bridge (0:20)

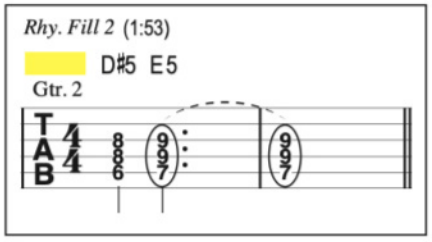


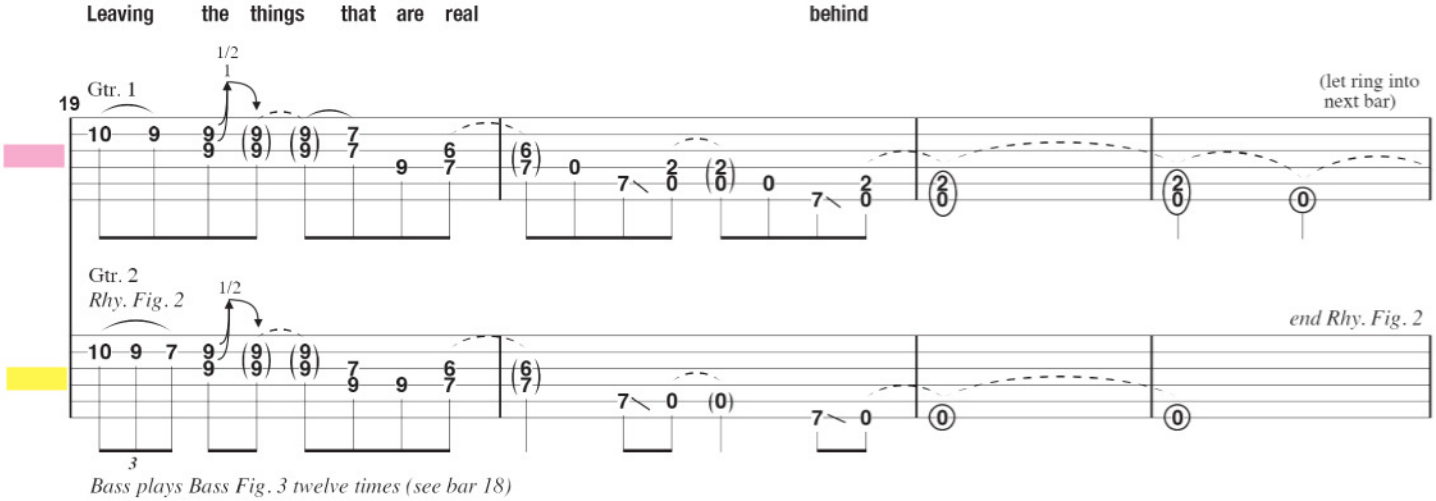
C 1st and 2nd Verses (0:32, 1:53)



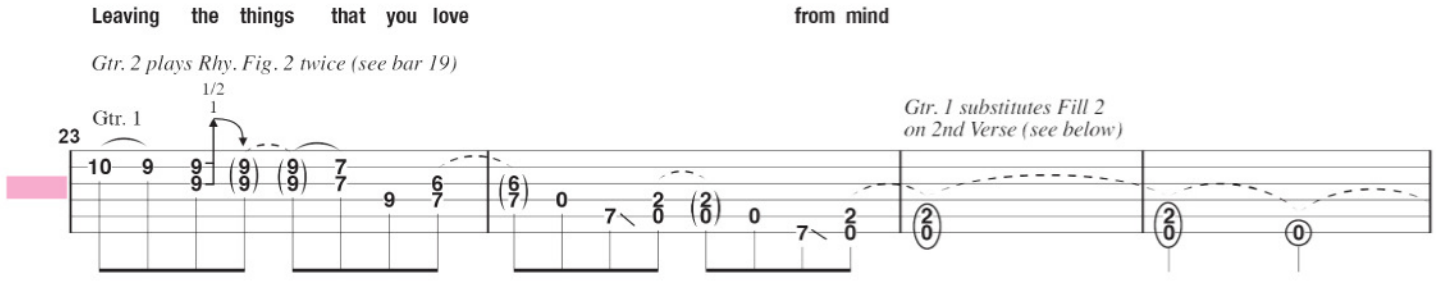




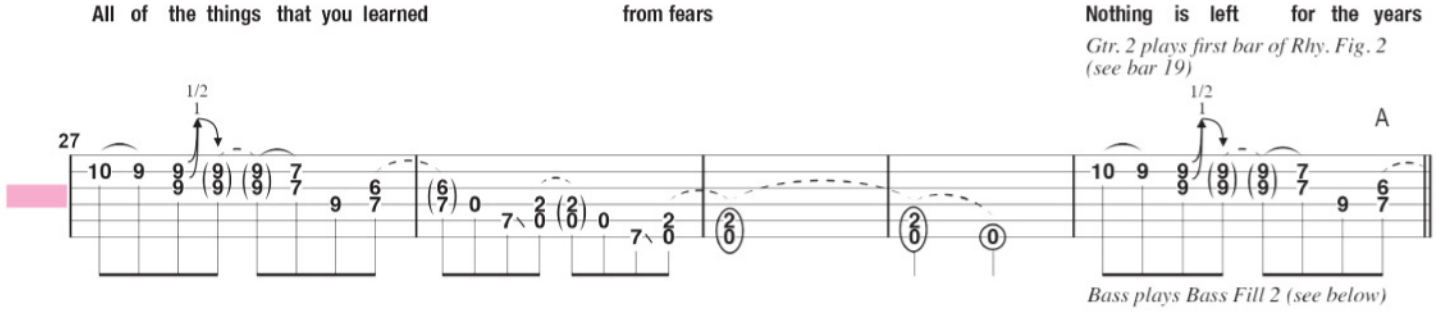




Bass plays Bass Fig. 3 twelve times (see bar 18)



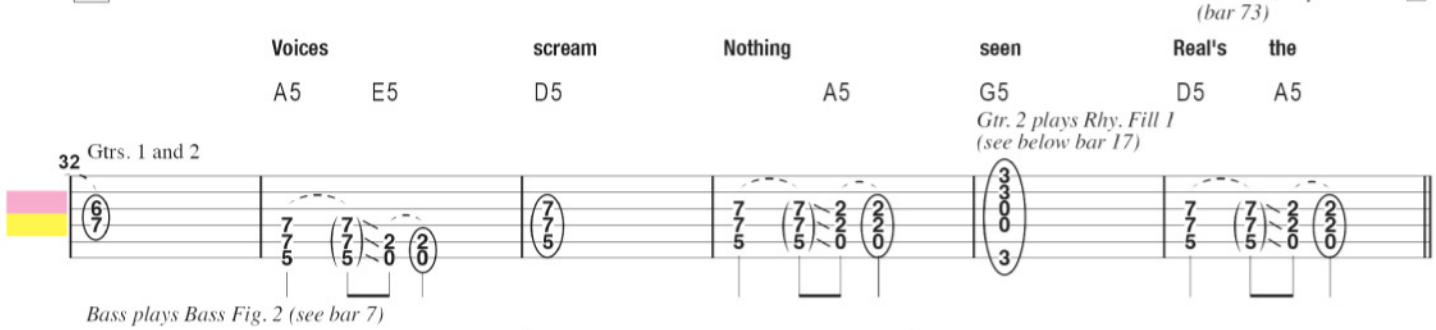
Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 2 twice (see bar 19)



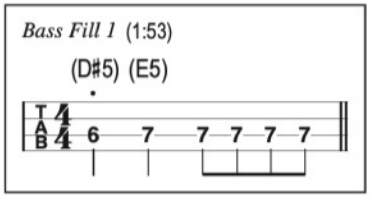
Bass plays Bass Fill 2 (see below)

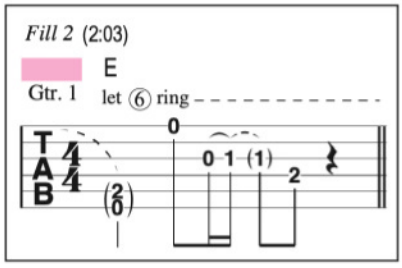
D **2nd and 4th Bridges** (0:50, 2:12)

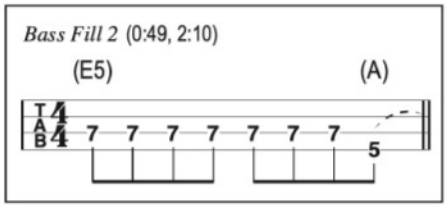
2nd time, skip ahead to H *(bar 73)*

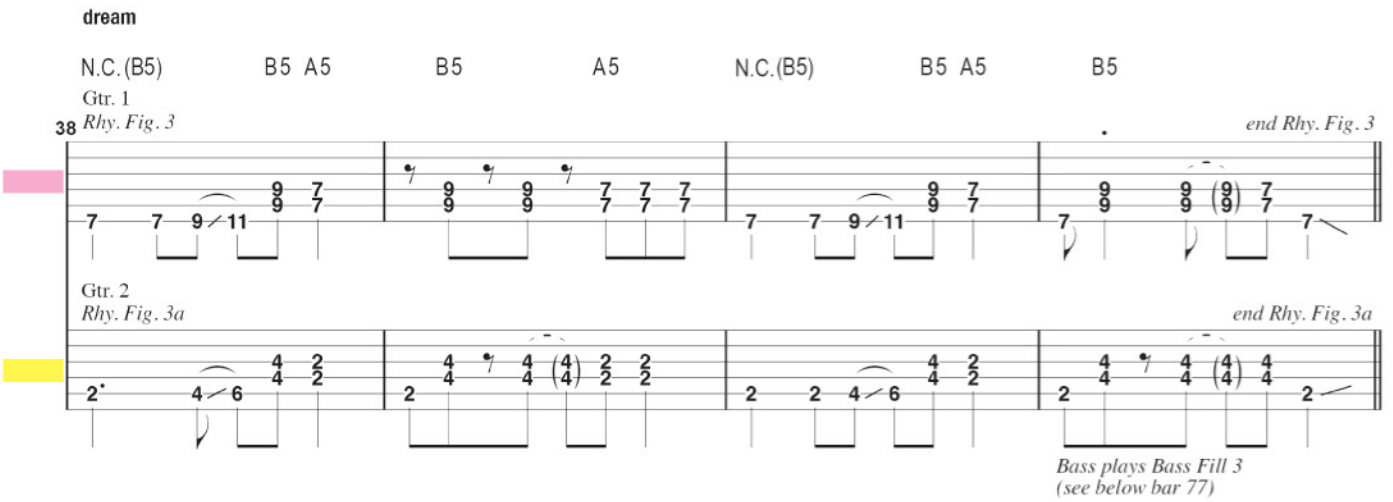


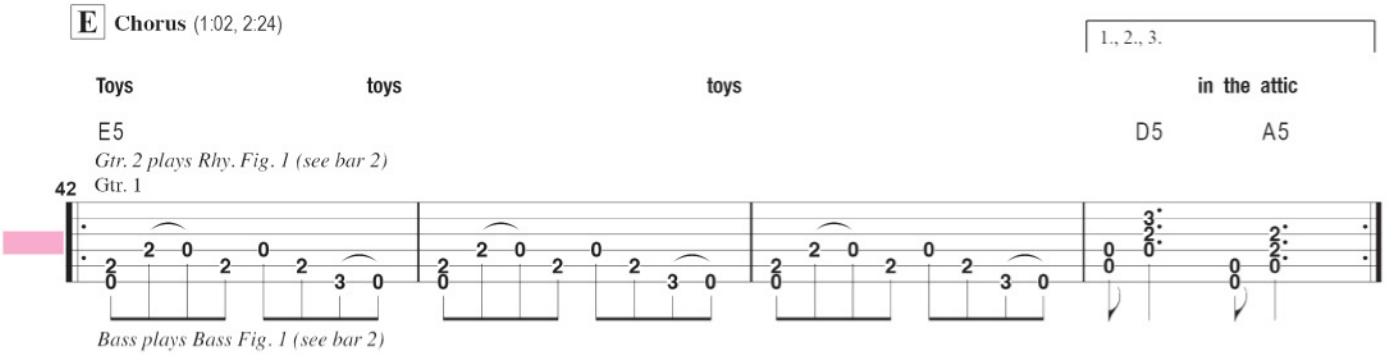
Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 (see bar 7)

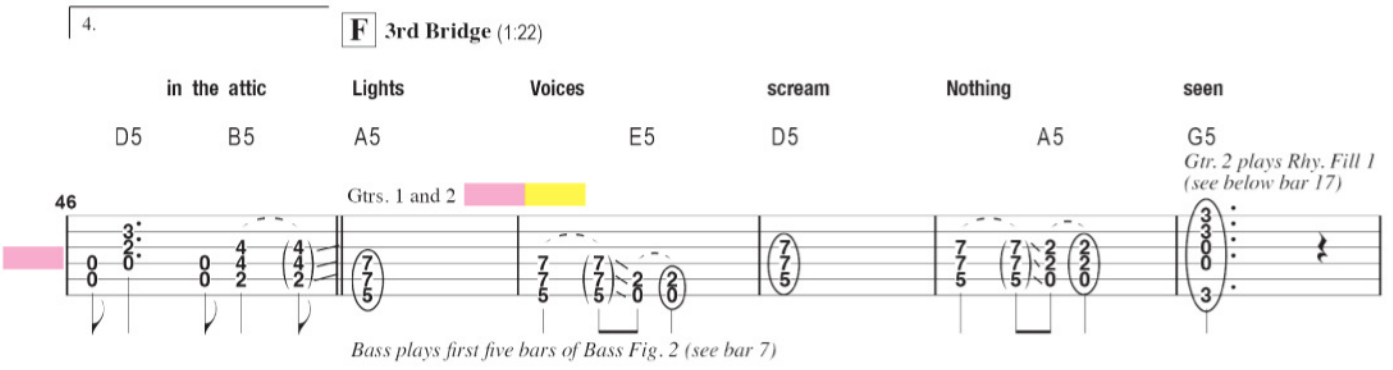


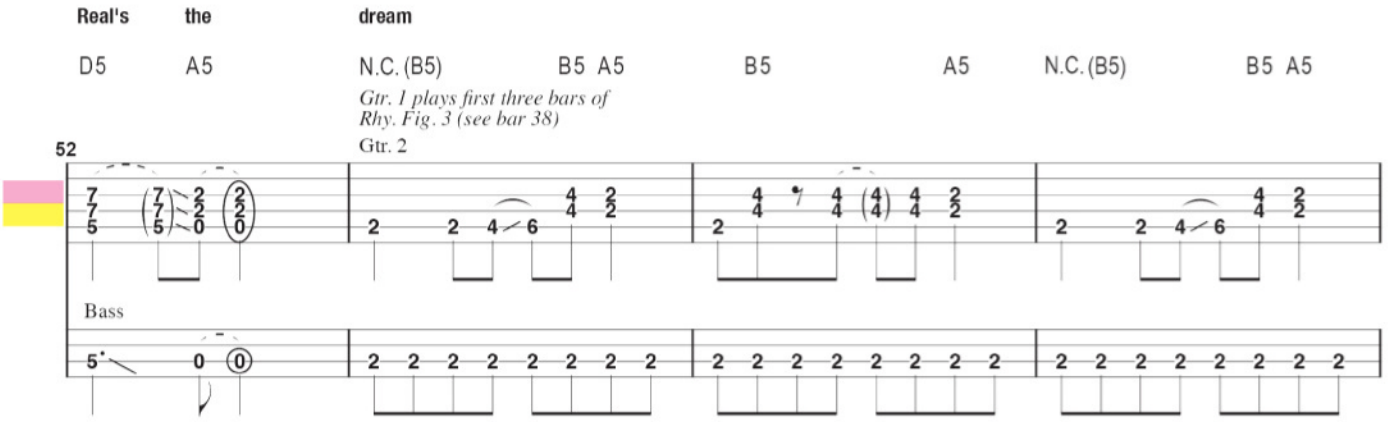




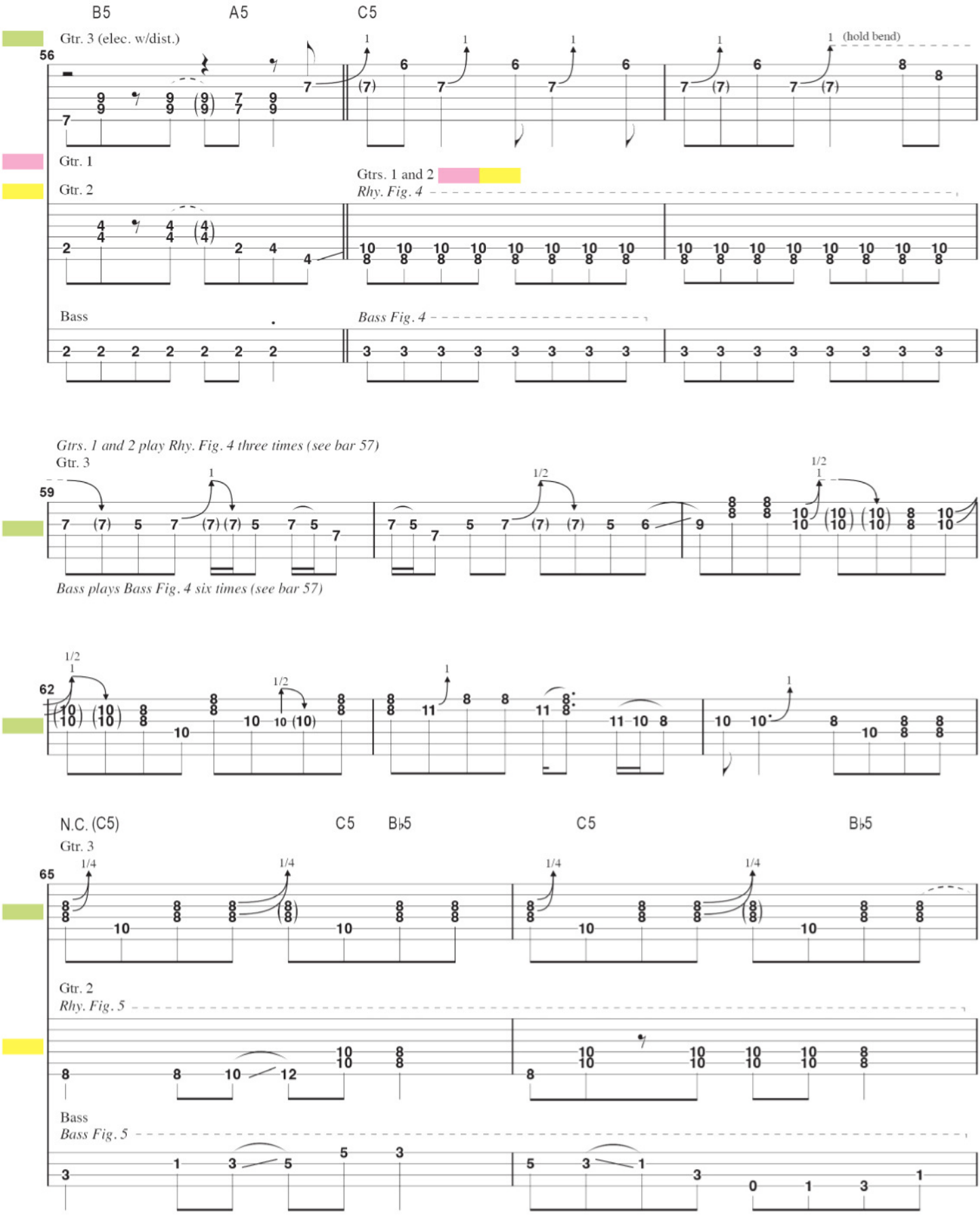

dream
N.C.(B5) B5 A5 B5 A5 N.C.(B5) B5 A5 B5
Gtr. 1
Rhy. Fig. 3
38
end Rhy. Fig. 3
Gtr. 2
Rhy. Fig. 3a
end Rhy. Fig. 3a
Bass plays Bass Fill 3
(see below bar 77)

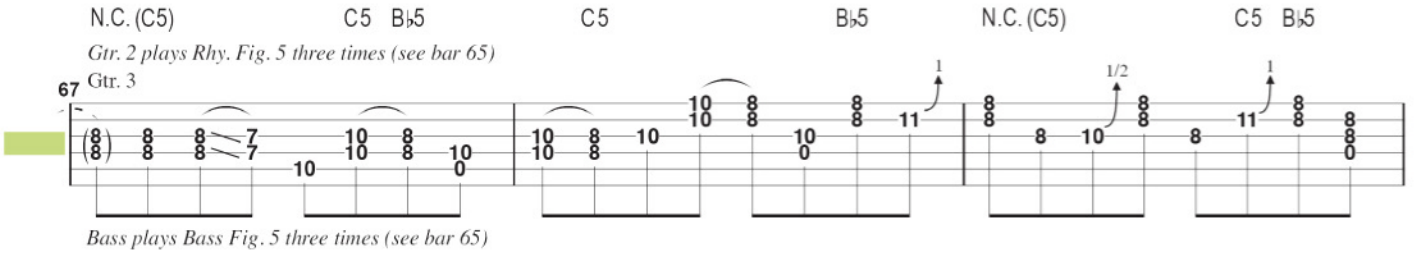

E Chorus (1:02, 2:24)
1., 2., 3.
Toys toys toys in the attic
E5 D5 A5
Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 (see bar 2)
42
Gtr. 1
Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 (see bar 2)


4.
F 3rd Bridge (1:22)
in the attic Lights Voices scream Nothing seen
D5 B5 A5 E5 D5 A5 G5
Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fill 1
(see below bar 17)
46
Gtrs. 1 and 2
Bass plays first five bars of Bass Fig. 2 (see bar 7)

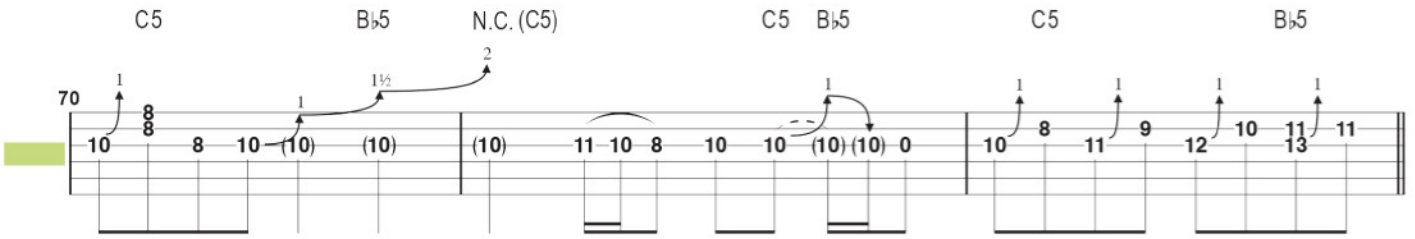

Real's the dream
D5 A5 N.C.(B5) B5 A5 B5 A5 N.C.(B5) B5 A5
Gtr. 1 plays first three bars of
Rhy. Fig. 3 (see bar 38)
52
Gtr. 2
Bass

G Guitar Solo (Joe Perry) (1:34)



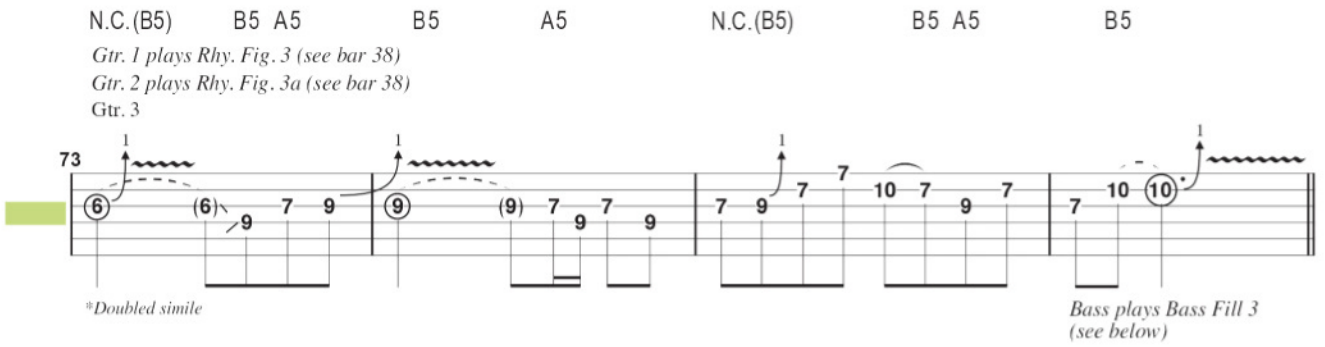


Go back to C 2nd verse (bar 17)



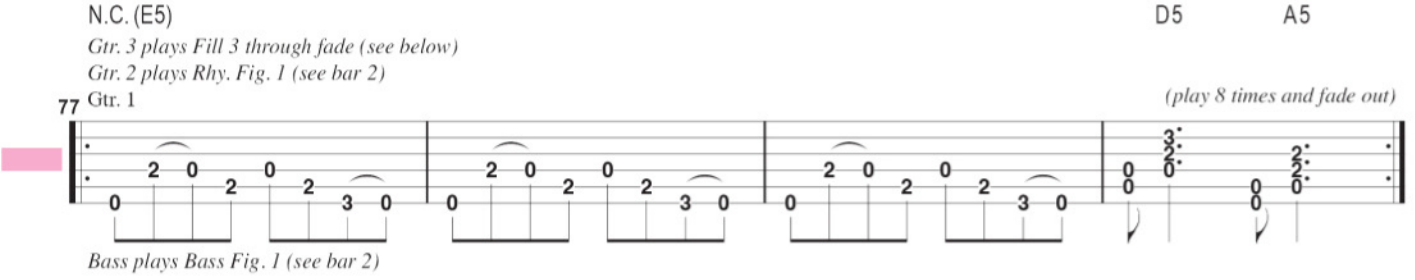
H (2:19)

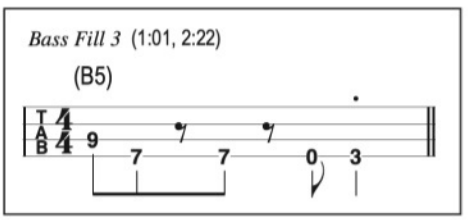
dream

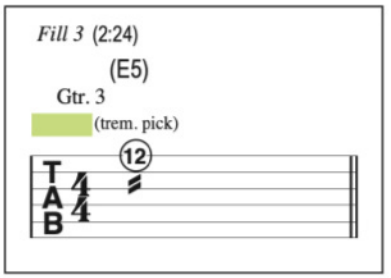


I **Outro** (2:24)

Toys **toys** **toys** **in the attic**







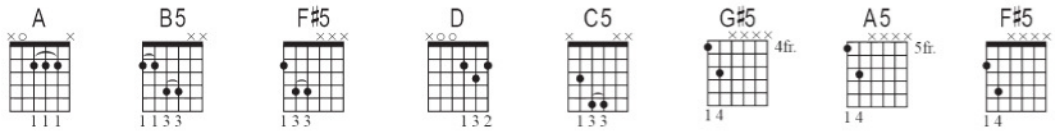
"I LOVE LA"

Starcrawler

As heard on **STARCRAWLER**

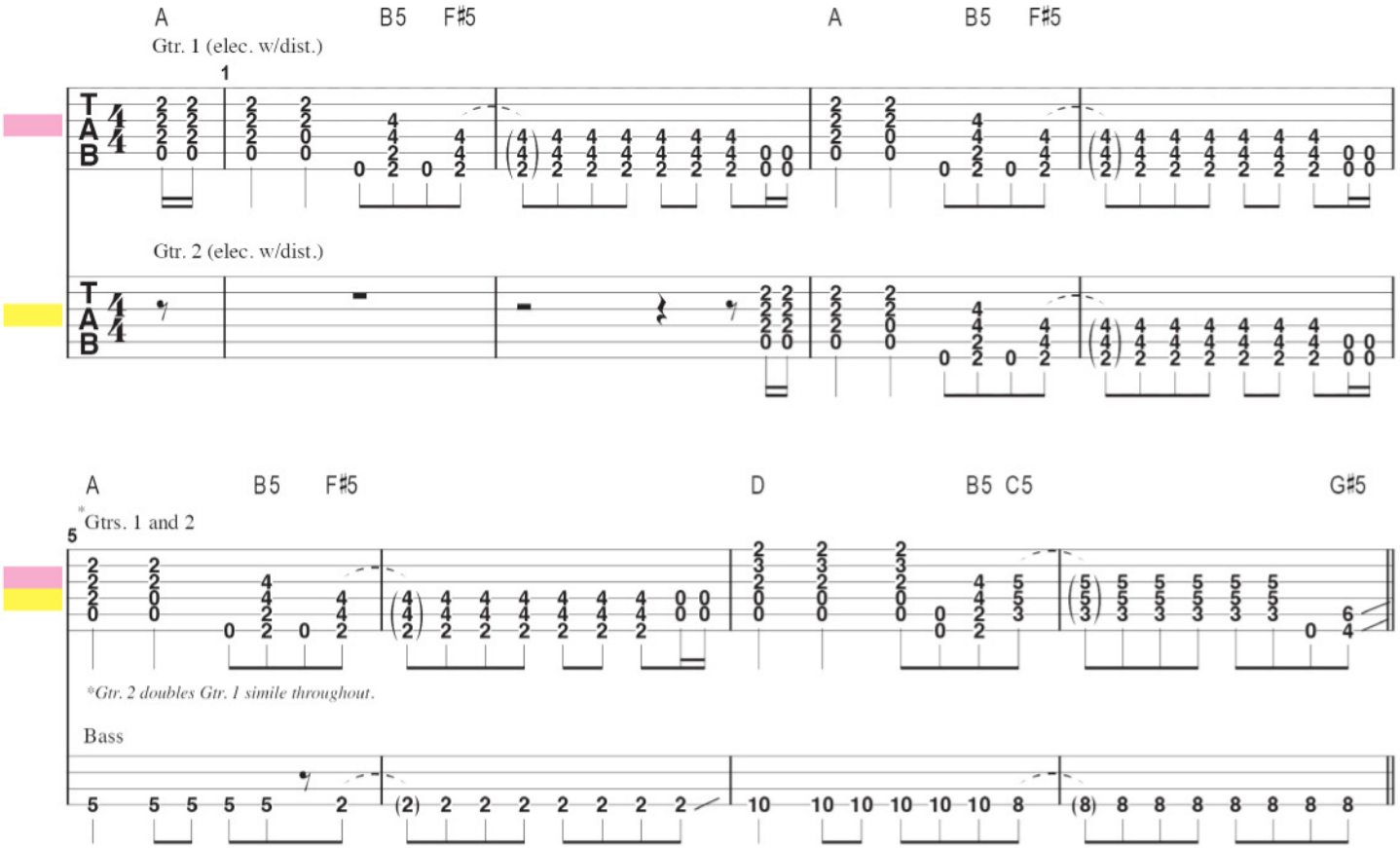
Words and Music by ARROW DE WILDE, HENDRIK KACHOEFF, TIMOTHY FRANCO *and* AUSTIN SMITH

• *Transcribed by* JEFF PERRIN

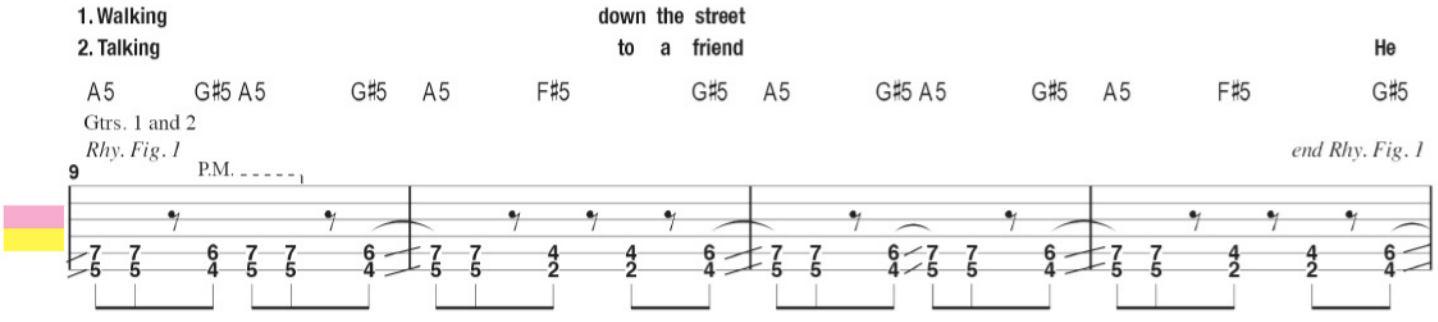


A **Intro** (0:00)

Moderately Fast ♩ = 142



B **Verses** (0:14, 0:57) (♩ = 140)



"I LOVE LA"
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Every type of person I meet
said he'd never ever wanna ever come back again I

A5 G♯5 A5 G♯5 A5 F♯5 G♯5 A5 G♯5 A5 G♯5 A5 F♯5 G♯5

13

Bass plays Bass Fill 1 second time (see bar 34)

Living down here
call him on the phone

A5 G♯5 A5 G♯5 A5 F♯5 G♯5 A5 G♯5 A5 G♯5 A5 F♯5 G♯5

Gtrs. 1 and 2

17 P.M. P.M.

Bass

Bass Fig. 1

(grad. increase tempo)

Cruising everywhere just to get in your nightmares
Put a quarter in He can listen to my ringtone

A5 G♯5 A5 G♯5 A5 F♯5 G♯5 A5 G♯5 A5 G♯5 A5 F♯5

21

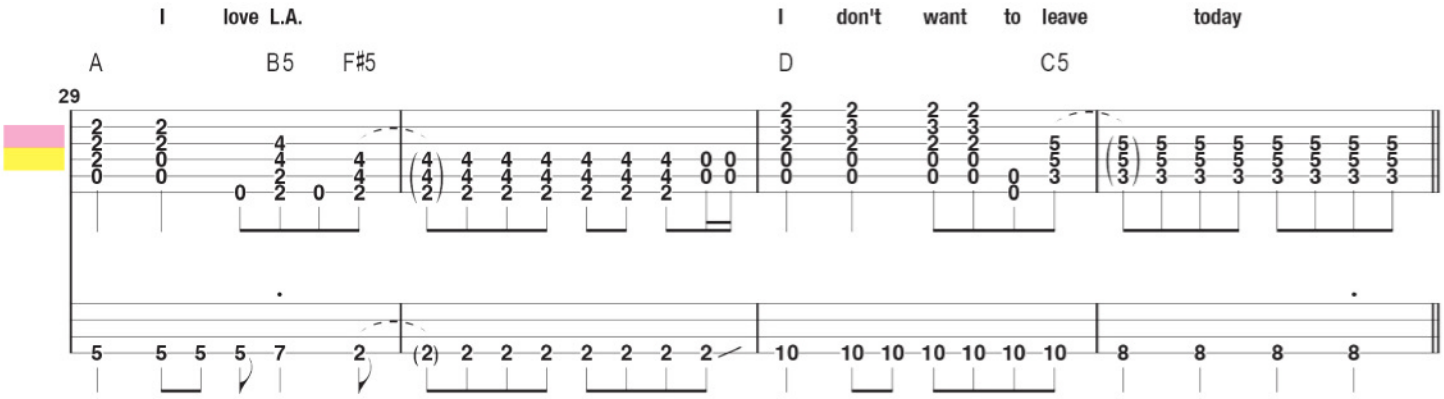
Bass Fig. 2

C **Chorus** (0:41, 1:25) (♩ = 144)

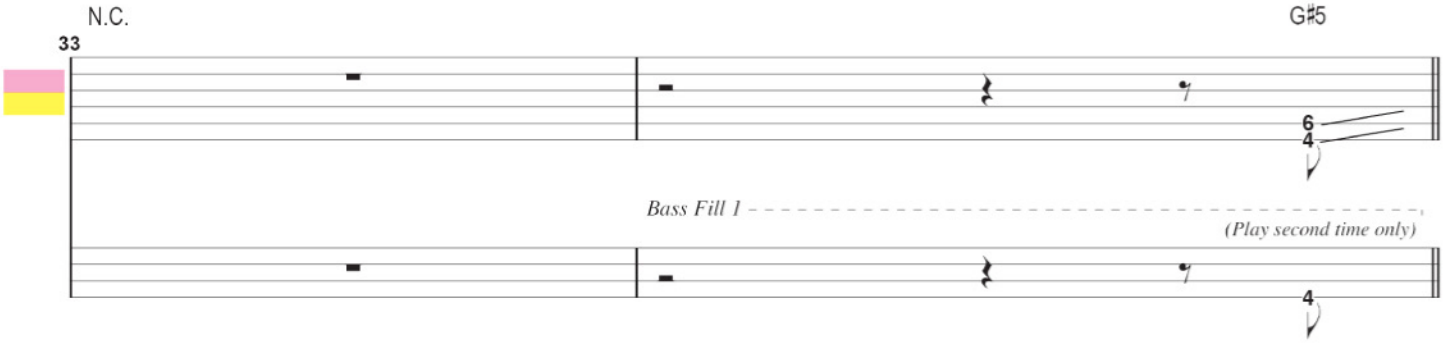
I love L.A. I love L.A.

A B5 F♯5 A B5 F♯5

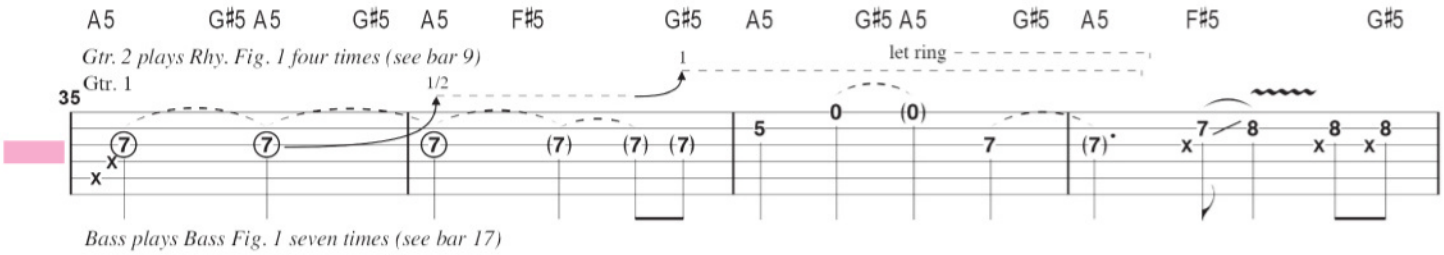
25



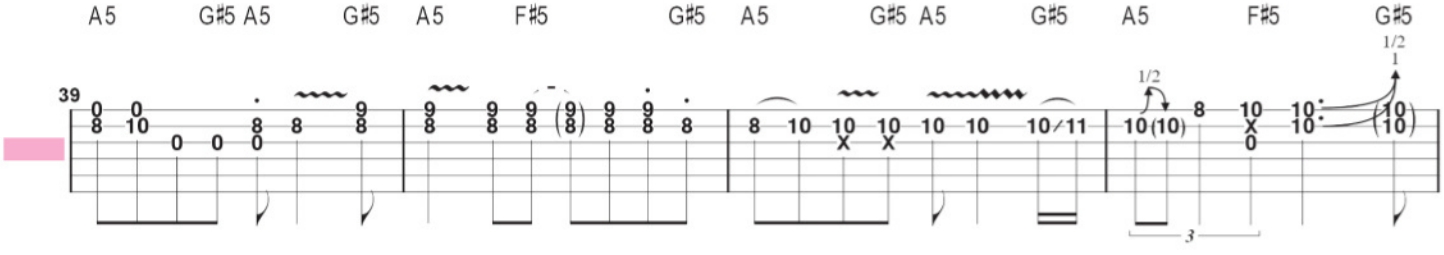
1st time, go back to B *2nd verse (bar 9)*

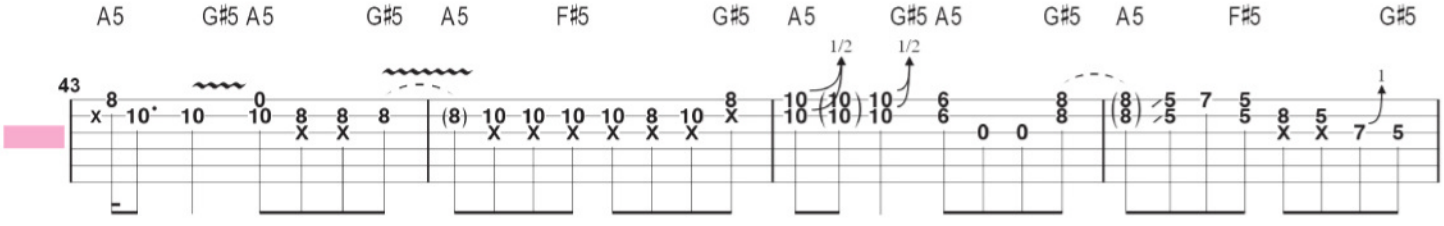


D **Guitar Solo** (1:41) (♩ = 140)

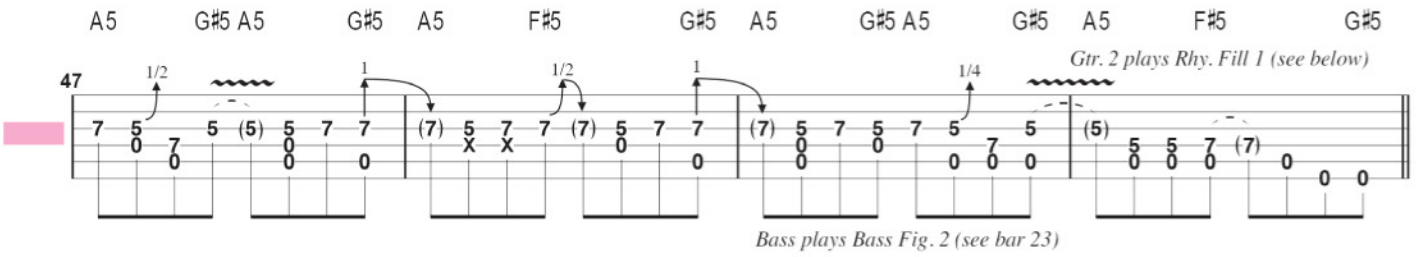


Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 seven times (see bar 17)



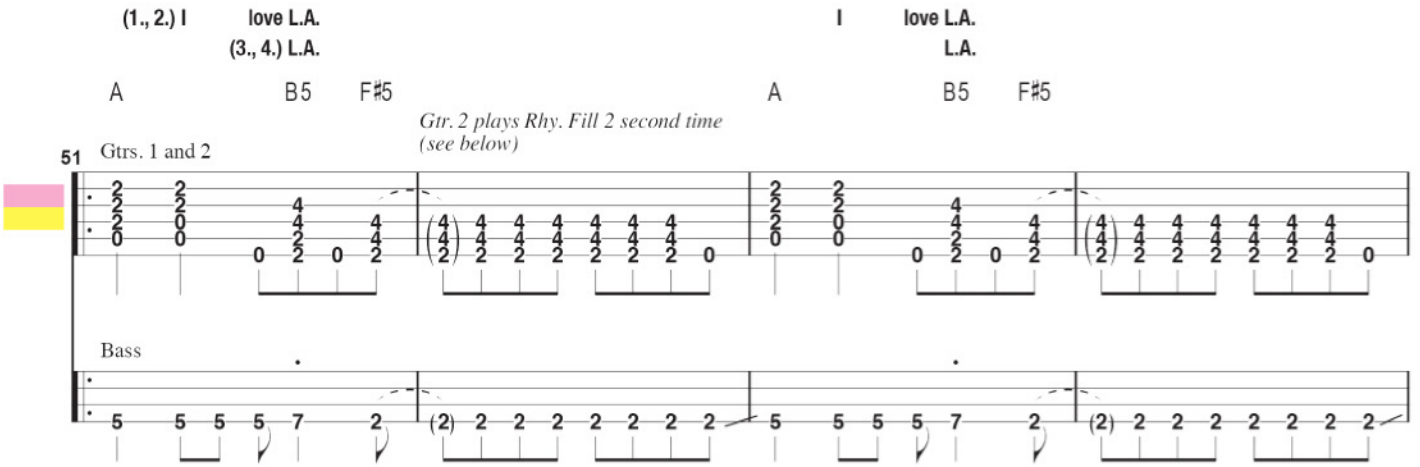


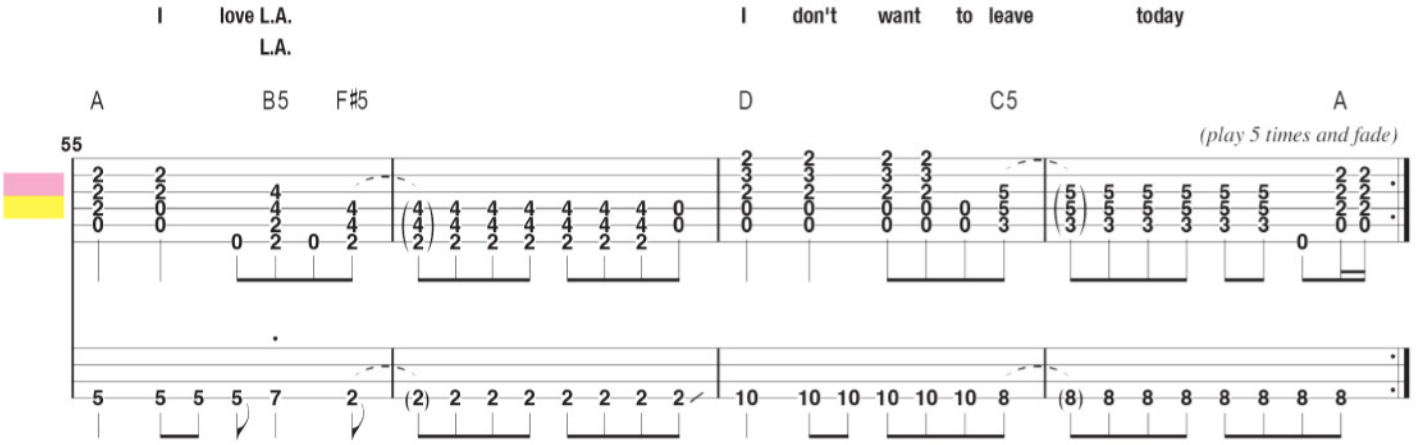
(grad. increase tempo)

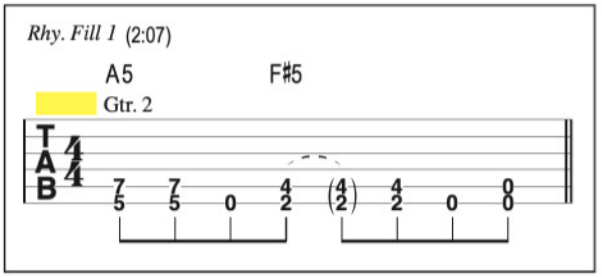


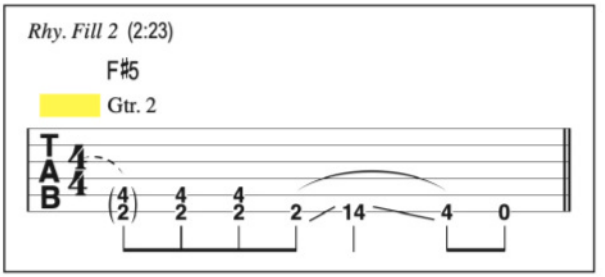
Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 (see bar 23)

E **Outro Chorus** (2:09) (♩ = 144)







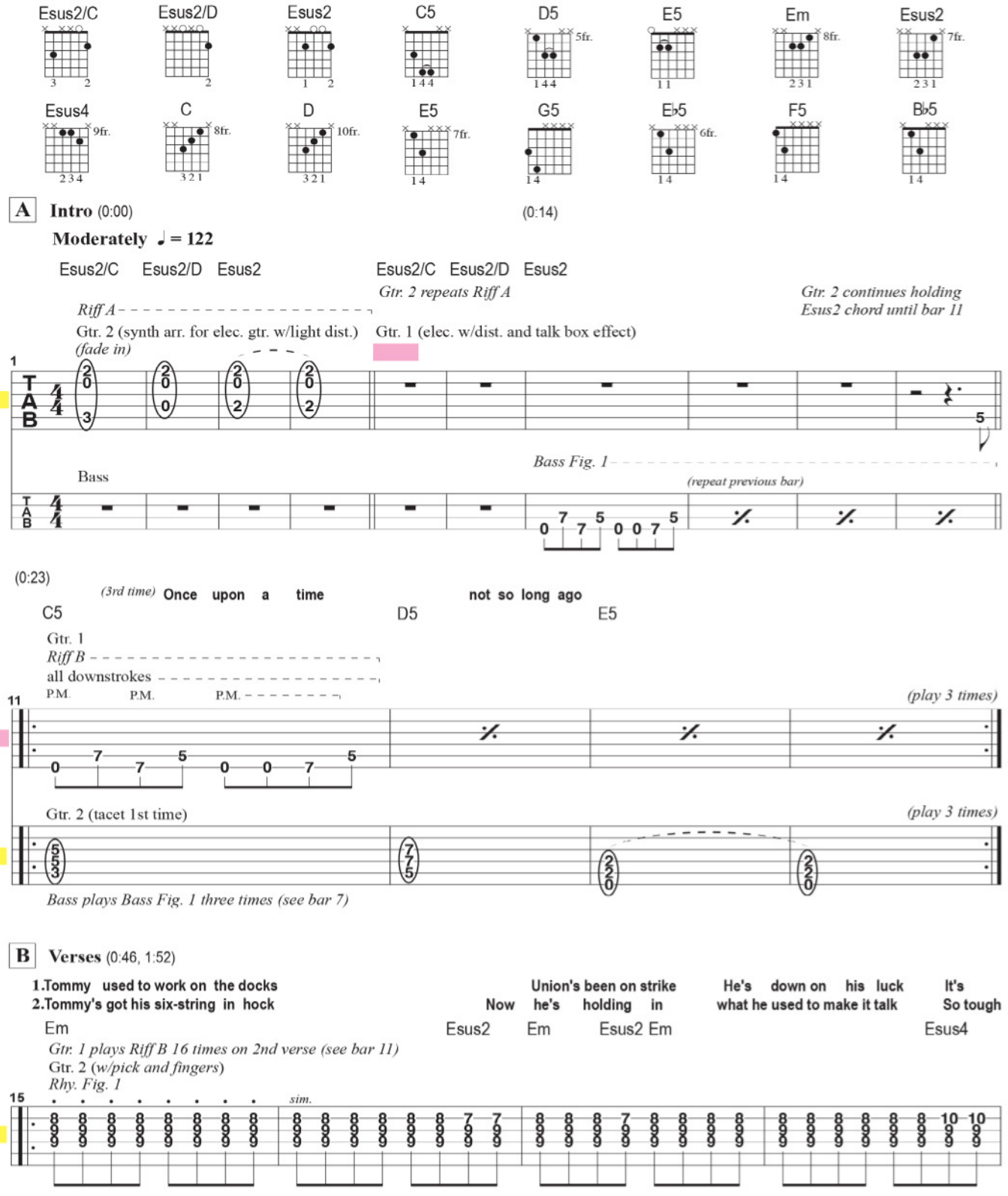


"LIVIN' ON A PRAYER"

Bon Jovi

As heard on **SLIPPERY WHEN WET**

Words and Music by JON BON JOVI, DESMOND CHILD *and* RICHIE SAMBORA • *Transcribed by* JEFF PERRIN



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tough So tough
Hmm It's tough

C D Em Esus4 Em Esus2

Gtr. 3 plays Fill 1 on 2nd Verse (see below bar 27)

Gtr. 1

19

P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M.

Gtr. 2 *end Rhy. Fig. 1*

Bass

Gina works the diner all day Working for her man She brings home her pay for
Gina dreams of runnin' away When she cries in the night Tommy whispers "Baby it's okay

Em Esus2 Em Esus4

Gtr. 1

23

P.M. P.M.

Bass

love Hmm for love She says we gotta
Someday" We've gotta

C5 D5 N.C. (E5)

27

P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M.

Bass

Fill 1 (2:00)

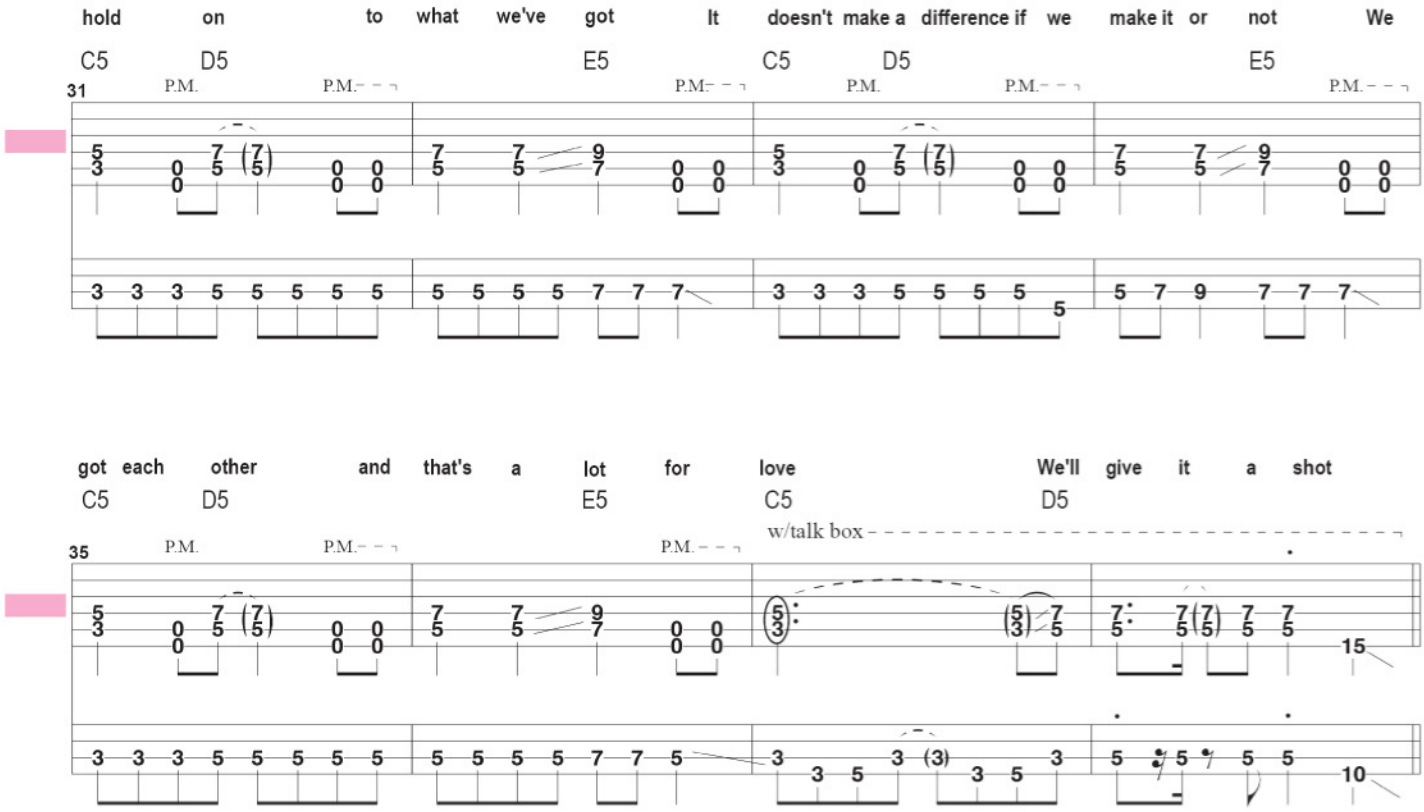
(C5) (D5) N.C. (E5)

Gtr. 3 (elec. w/dist. and talk box effect)

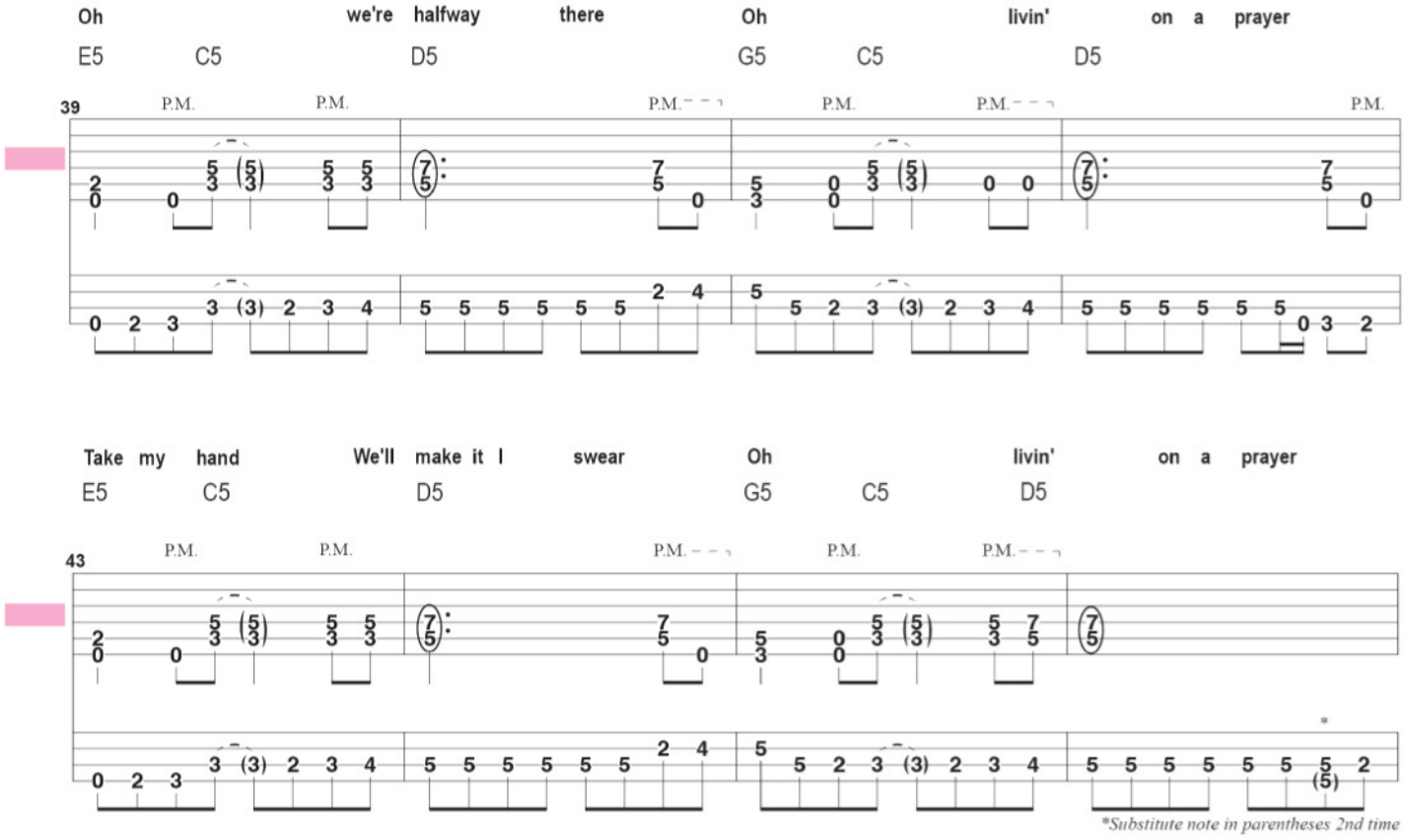
3/4

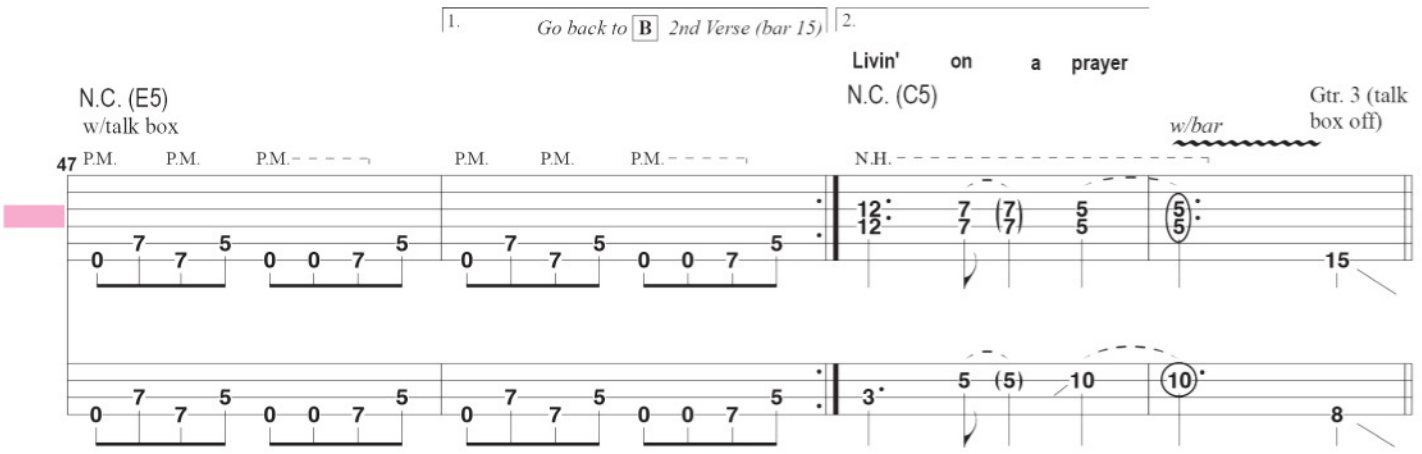
dive w/bar

C 1st and 2nd Pre-choruses (1:17, 2:23)

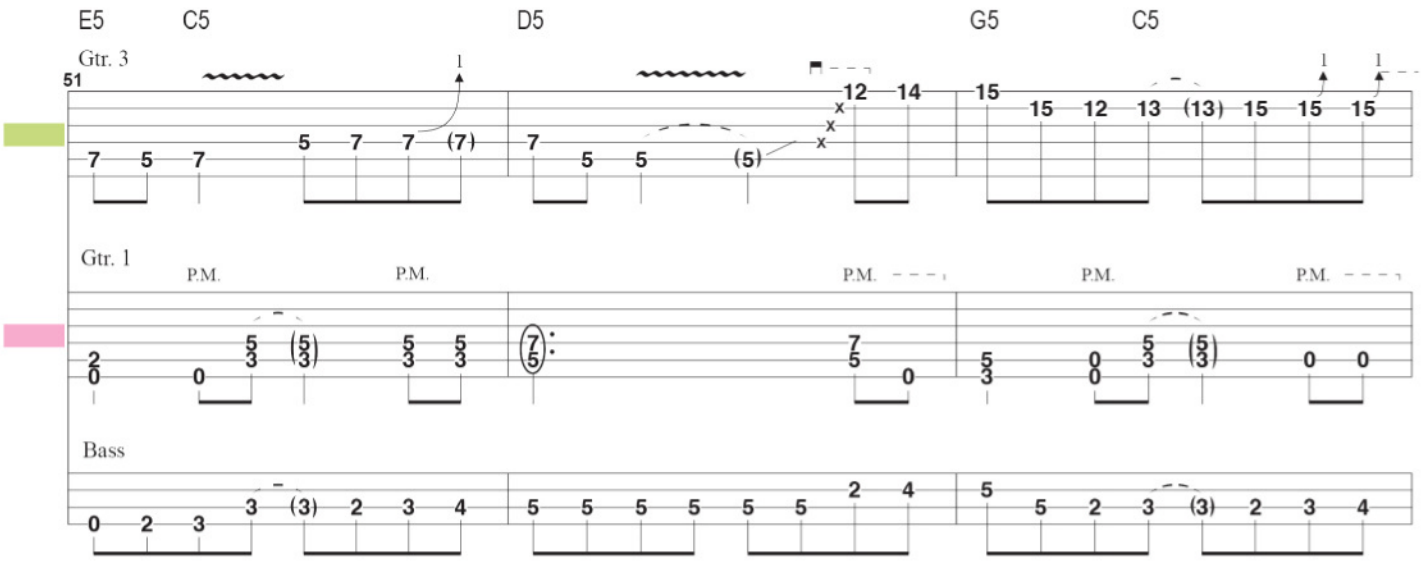


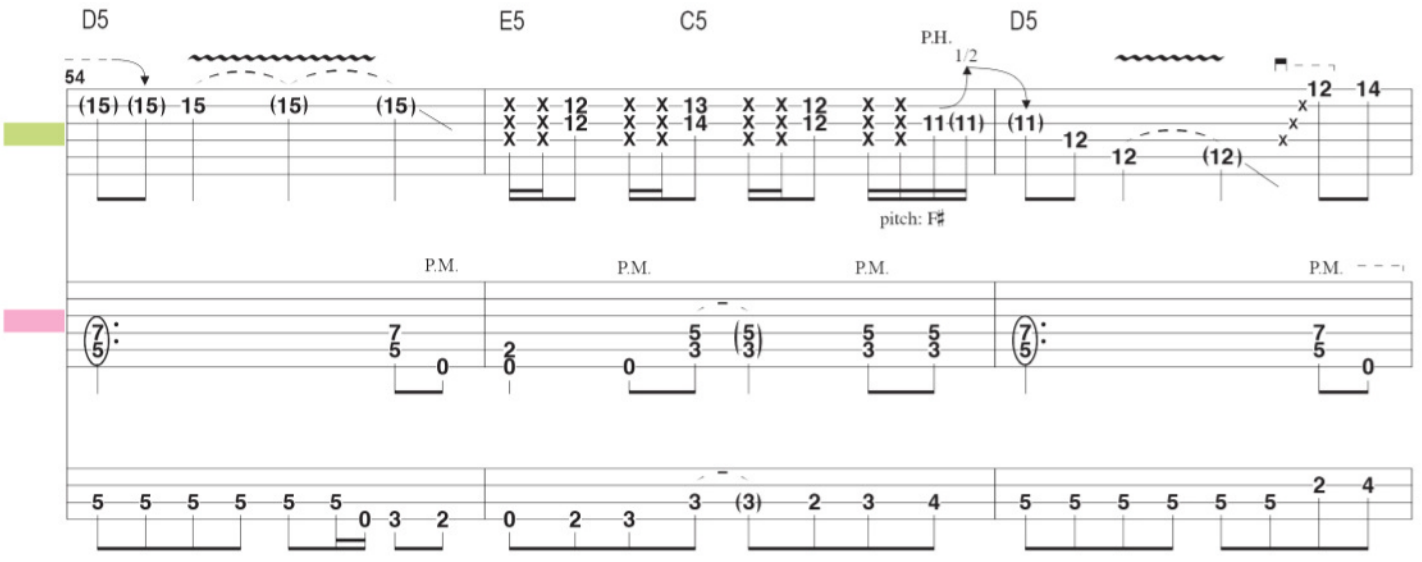
D 1st and 2nd Choruses (1:33, 2:39)

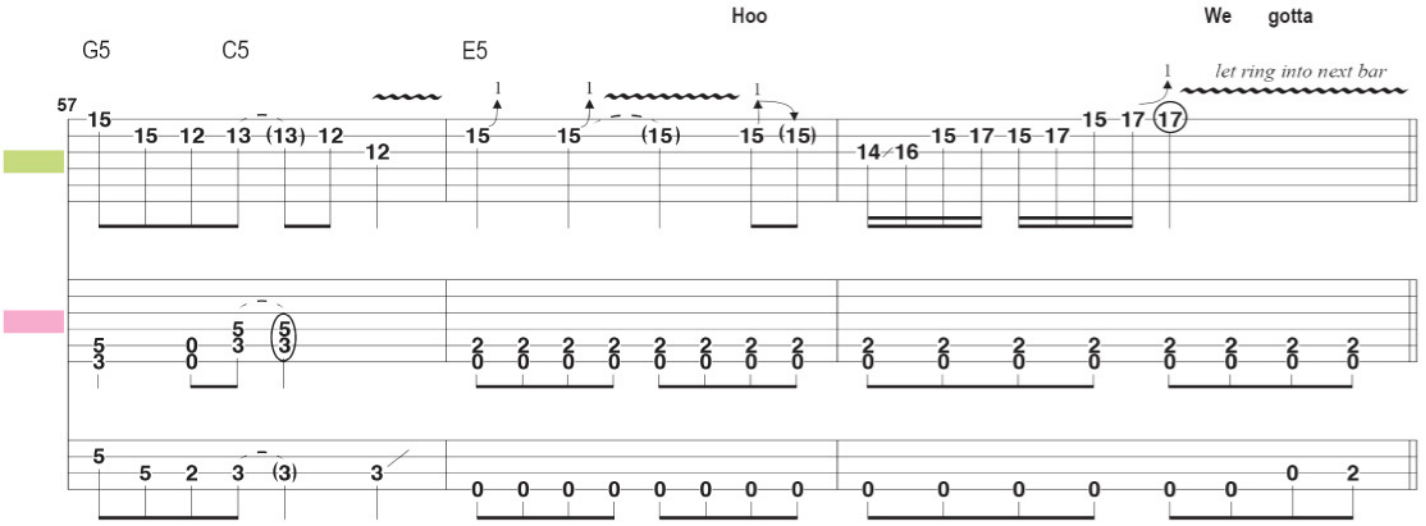




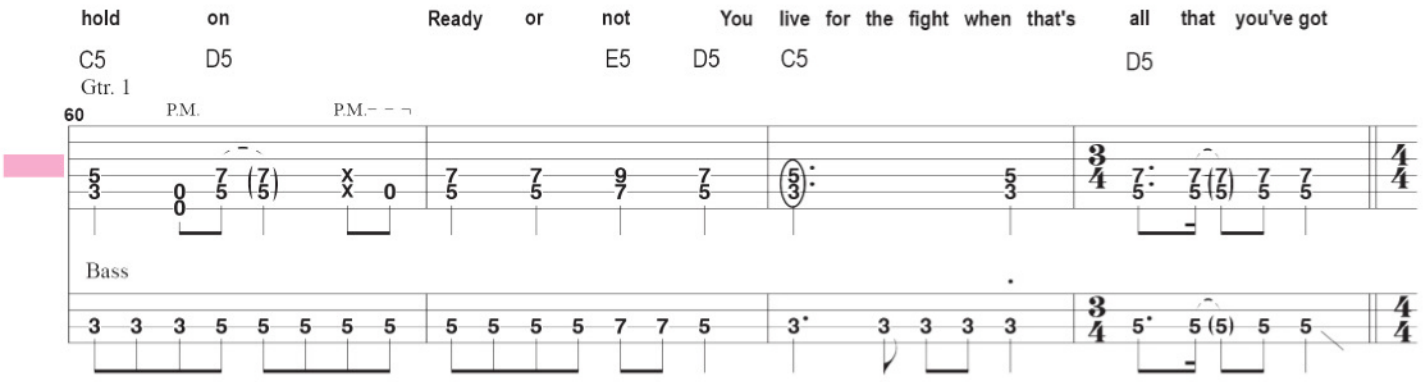
E **Guitar Solo** (2:59)



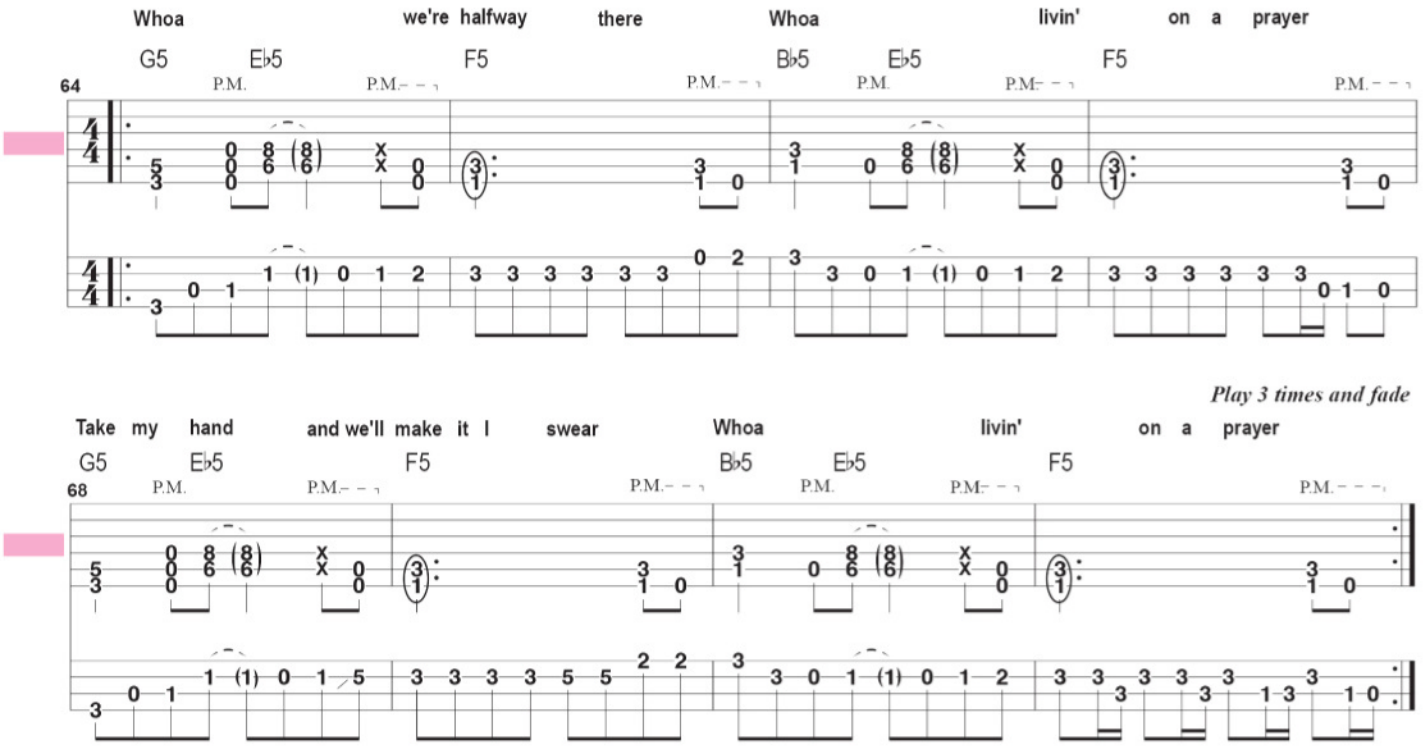




F **3rd Pre-chorus** (3:16)



G **Outro Chorus** (3:24)



Performance Notes

HOW TO PLAY THIS MONTH'S SONGS **By Jimmy Brown**

"TOYS IN THE ATTIC"
Aerosmith

THIS CLASSIC UPTEMPO rocker and title track from Aerosmith's blockbuster third album showcases guitarists Joe Perry and Brad Whitford's excellent arranging teamwork, as they effectively combine different, complementary parts with their similarly overdriven Gibson Les Pauls that mesh together beautifully.

The song kicks off with an instrumental iteration of the chorus, with Perry deftly picking a busy, grinding E minor pentatonic riff in 1st position while Whitford provides a supportive yet unobtrusive power chord part punctuated with percussive, fret-hand-muted "chucka" strums. The two guitarists come together at the end of the repeating four-bar phrase (bars 5 and 6) by doubling power chord accents then stay together as the first bridge unfolds at section B.

As the verse gets under way at section C, the two guitarists' parts again diverge, albeit briefly, at bar 23, where Perry momentarily doubles Steven Tyler's vocal melody with a catchy pull-off and double-stop bend lick. Bradford, meanwhile, performs a slick variation, fitting in a quick triplet double pull-off on beat 1. When playing the brief double-stop bend on beat 2, you may find that barring and bending both strings with your 3rd finger, supported by the 1st/2nd fingers, works best for Perry's simpler Gtr. 1 part. For Whitford's more noodly Gtr. 2 part, you may want to instead bend the G and B strings individually, using the tips of your 3rd and 4th fingers, respectively.

Perry's fiery solo, beginning at section G, is like "Chuck Berry on steroids," featuring lots of oblique, double-stop and unison bends and jabbing eighth-note rhythms. The guitarist starts off with a cool and unusual oblique bend on non-adjacent strings, for which he pairs a high B♭ note — the ♭7 of C — with a whole-step bend from D — the 2nd — up to E — the major 3rd. This opening lick requires an atypical and potentially tricky fingering, as you'll need to fret the B♭ on the 1st string's 6th fret with either your 1st or 2nd finger while bending the G string with just your 2nd or 3rd finger. Using extra-light-gauge strings makes this move smoothly doable.

"I LOVE LA"
Starcrawler

WITH THE RAW, raucous spirit of punk and alternative rock, Starcrawler guitarist Henri Cash performs this fun, catchy song's simple power chord-driven riffs with gusto, conviction and a bold, punchy tone. And while he's pounding his strings in a way that brings to mind the celebrated, influential strumming styles of Pete Townshend, Kurt Cobain and Dave Grohl, there's also a lot of controlled and unseen muting discipline happening, which lend his parts a powerful tightness.

In the song's opening riff and choruses (sections A, C and E), Cash uses all downstrokes for his eighth-note rhythms and adds pairs of quick down-up 16th-note strums at the end of certain bars, just before changing chords. What you don't see or hear is the way the guitarist quickly silences his open low E string just before he strums the open A5 chord at the beginning of bars 3 and 5. He does this by hooking his fret-hand thumb around the top side of the fretboard, just enough to touch the low E string and stop it from ringing into the next chord. Interestingly, when he performs a similar move in bar 7, moving to D5, he allows his open A string to ring into this chord, which, with its higher voicing, doesn't sound muddy, as the low E note would with A5.

During the verse section, beginning at letter B, Cash uses both hands to effectively mute his two-note power chords. Notice that, for the first eight bars, he employs fret-hand muting to completely silence the strings during the rests, or "holes of silence," that fall between accented strums on the eighth-note upbeats. This is done by simply relaxing your grip on the strings after strumming, without letting go of them. The guitarist also does a little bit of pick-hand palm muting (P.M.) here, in bar 9, which he uses as an articulation device, to alter the attack and decay of the chords, making them sound more subdued and chunky. In the second half of the verse, beginning at bar 17, Cash applies palm muting across three bars of steady downstrokes, creating urgent-sounding "pumping eighths," which provides an effective dynamic contrast to what precedes and follows.

"LIVIN' ON A PRAYER"
Bon Jovi

ONE OF THE Eighties' most enduringly popular hard rock/hair metal anthems, this well-written song features great riffs and melodic hooks and strong, musically effective contributions from all band members, including keyboardist David Bryan, whose signature chord parts we've arranged for guitar, beginning with the opening synthesizer pad. When playing this part, and the eighth-note accompaniment during the verses in section B, you'll want to use *hybrid picking* (pick and fingers) to sound the notes of each chord simultaneously. Also, notice the *staccato markings* in bar 15 — the little black dots above the tab numbers. These indicate that the rhythms are to be articulated "short and crisp," and this is achieved with fret-hand muting, momentarily loosening your grip on the strings immediately after picking them.

Guitarist Richie Sambora makes great use of a talk box effect to add vocal-like inflections to certain riffs and licks in this song, namely *Riff B* (bar 11) and *Fill 1* (see below bar 27). If you don't have a talk box, you can emulate its vowel-izing effect during these parts with a wah pedal.

When playing his power chord riffs during the song's pre-chorus and chorus (sections C and D), Sambora intermittently employs palm muting to keep things tight and tidy, as he liberally strums his open low E and A strings between his fretted chords. By palm muting these open notes, the guitarist ensures that the low E note won't ring, or "bleed," into the following C5 and D5 chords, which would sound sloppy and bad.

Sambora's solo (section E) exudes a flashy swagger while being highly melodic and cohesive. Notice the percussive grace-note rakes into the 12th-fret high E note in bars 52 and 56. These are performed by quickly dragging the pick across the top four strings while muting them with the fret hand's outstretched 1st finger.

There's one shreddy 16th-note run at the end of the solo, in bar 59, which is technically challenging to fret and alternate pick cleanly. Practice it slowly at first and be sure to use your 2nd finger to execute the quick upward slide from the 14th fret to the 16th.

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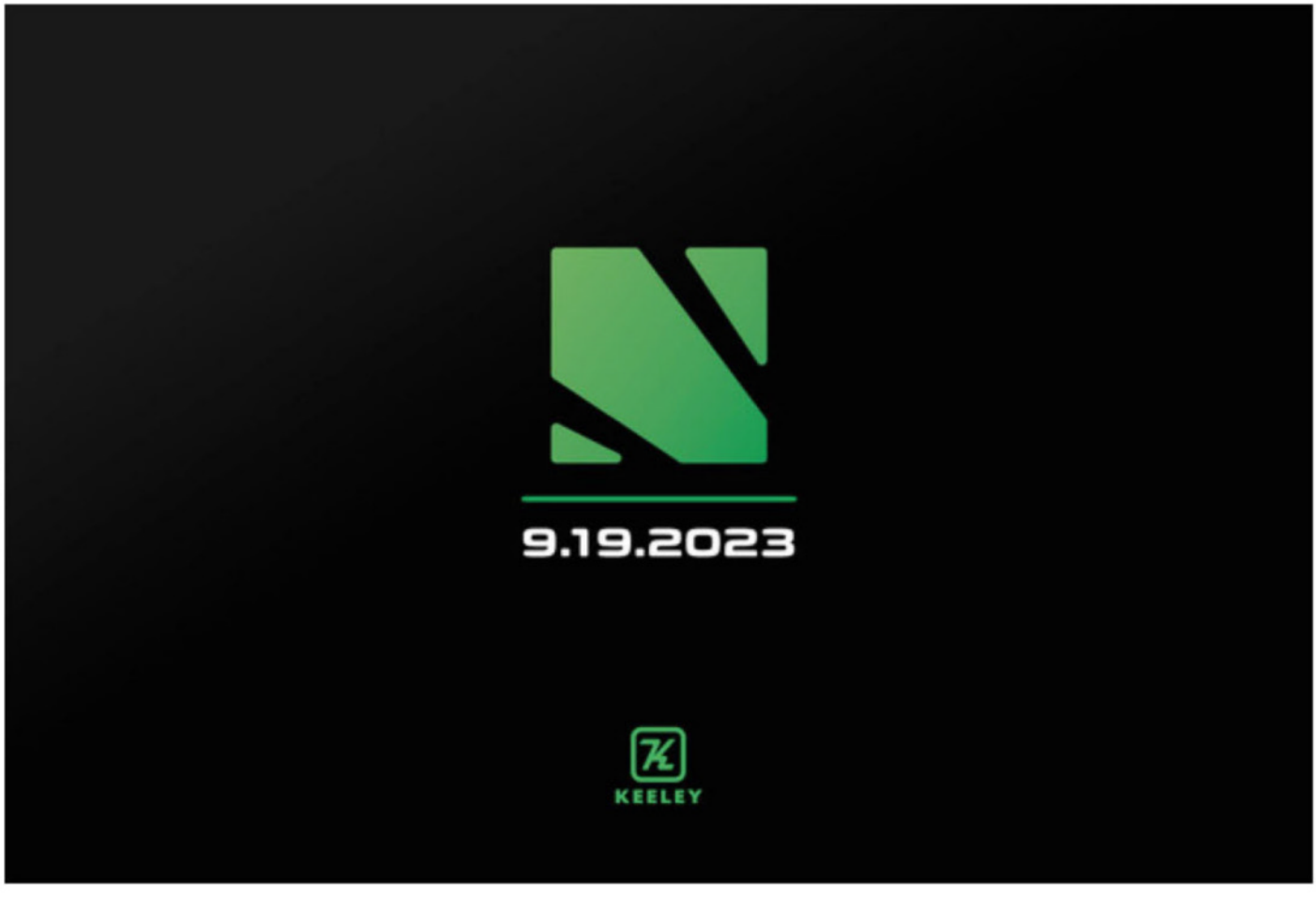
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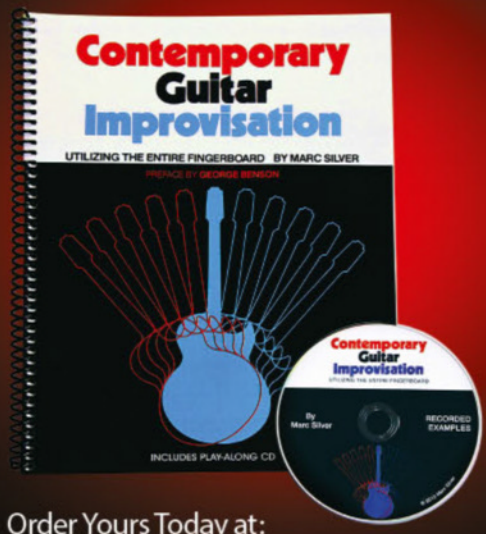

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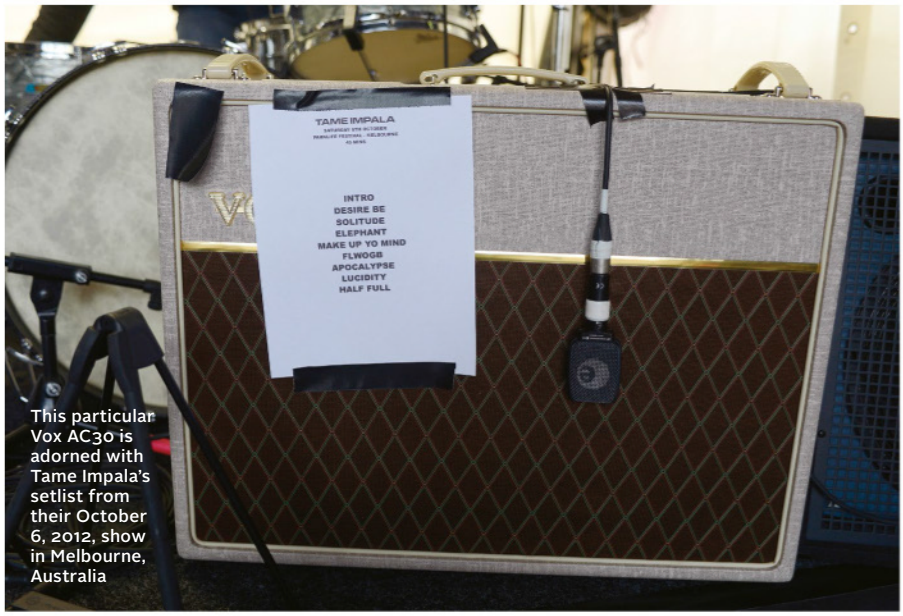
VOX AC30

CATEGORY: COMBO AMP

THE VOX AC30 consistently appears near the top of lists of the greatest guitar amps of all time (and if it doesn't appear, that list is highly suspect). The reason is simple: the Vox AC30 has a very distinctive sound that also happens to correspond with what many guitarists consider great tone. The bass is tight and round, the midrange throaty and vocal-like, the treble has a distinctive upper midrange "chime" and cut that sounds magical from clean to heavily overdriven, the attack is percussive, brilliant and instantaneous, and the dynamics are tantalizingly touch-responsive. A good Vox AC30 is the "desert island" amp of choice for many players, and the experience of playing through one should be on every guitarist's bucket list.

The Vox AC30 went through a variety of changes since its initial introduction in 1959. For most Vox aficionados, the sweet spot is the mid-Sixties AC30/6 Twin "Top Boost" model, which became the blueprint for the various models that fall under the AC30 designation today. The AC30/6 Twin is a three-channel (vibrato, normal, brilliant) combo that provides about 30 watts of output from a circuit featuring a quartet of EL84 power tubes, four ECC83 (12AX7) tubes for the preamp and vibrato gain/modulator, one ECC82 for vibrato oscillator and a GZ34 tube rectifier. Long mistakenly described as a Class A amp, the AC30's circuit is actually a Class AB (push/pull) design with fixed cathode bias that is biased hotter than most fixed bias amps. Another important element of the classic AC30's distinctive classic sound is a pair of 15-watt, 8-ohm Celestion G12 speakers with Alnico magnets, which overdrive quite nicely when the amp is pushed moderately hard.



This particular Vox AC30 is adorned with Tame Impala's setlist from their October 6, 2012, show in Melbourne, Australia

MARTIN PHILBEY/REDFERNS

A big factor in the Vox AC30's success for more than five decades is the amp's association with the early Beatles, but in fact the Beatles used the AC30 in the studio and especially on stage only for a very brief period mostly during 1963 before they moved on to bigger, more powerful Vox models like the AC50 and AC100 (although an AC30 would occasionally appear during studio sessions through 1966). While the AC30's association with the Beatles still looms large, it's also equally well known today as the amp of choice for Brian May (whose treble booster/AC30 setup was inspired by Rory Gallagher's early rig) and the Edge. The list of AC30 players over the years is huge and expansive, from the pioneers of the British Invasion (Beck, Clapton and Page with the Yardbirds, the Kinks, the Rolling Stones, the Who, etc.) through punk (Paul Weller of the Jam and others), roots rock (Tom Petty, Mike Campbell, R.E.M.), shoegaze/alternative (Kevin Shields, Radiohead, Johnny Marr), Britpop (Oasis through Arctic Monkeys) and grunge (Pearl Jam, Kurt Cobain, Jerry Cantrell) up to today's top artists like Dave Grohl and Matthew Bellamy. The AC30 also is popular with many country guitarists, particularly Brad Paisley.

The experience of playing through a good Vox AC30 should be on every guitarist's bucket list

The AC30 has pretty much been in continuous production since its intro, although there have been numerous changes in ownership and designs along the way, such as solid-state rectifiers, reverb tanks and hybrid circuits inspired by earlier Vox models that utilize an EF86 tube. The recent hand-wired versions have rightfully earned acclaim, and the current AC30C2X with Alnico Blue speakers offers classic AC30 tone for a reasonable price. It should also be noted that the AC30 provided the foundation for some of the most beloved boutique amps of the last few decades, including the Trainwreck Rocket, Matchless DC-30/C-30, Bad Cat Black Cat 30, Bruno Underground 30, Divided By 13 RSA 31, Dr. Z Z Wreck and Top Hat King Royale.

SUGGESTED SETTINGS

(Vox AC30C2)

Sparkling chime
Input: Top Boost High
Top Boost channel Volume: 5
Treble: 6
Bass: 3
Master Tone Cut: 0
Master Volume: 4
Tip: *For maximum shimmer and shine, use a solidbody with a single-coil bridge pickup like a Tele or Strat.*

Singing lead
Input: Normal High
Normal channel Volume: 8
Master Tone Cut: 5
Master Volume: 6
Tip: *For maximum shimmer and shine, use a solidbody with a single-coil bridge pickup like a Tele or Strat.*

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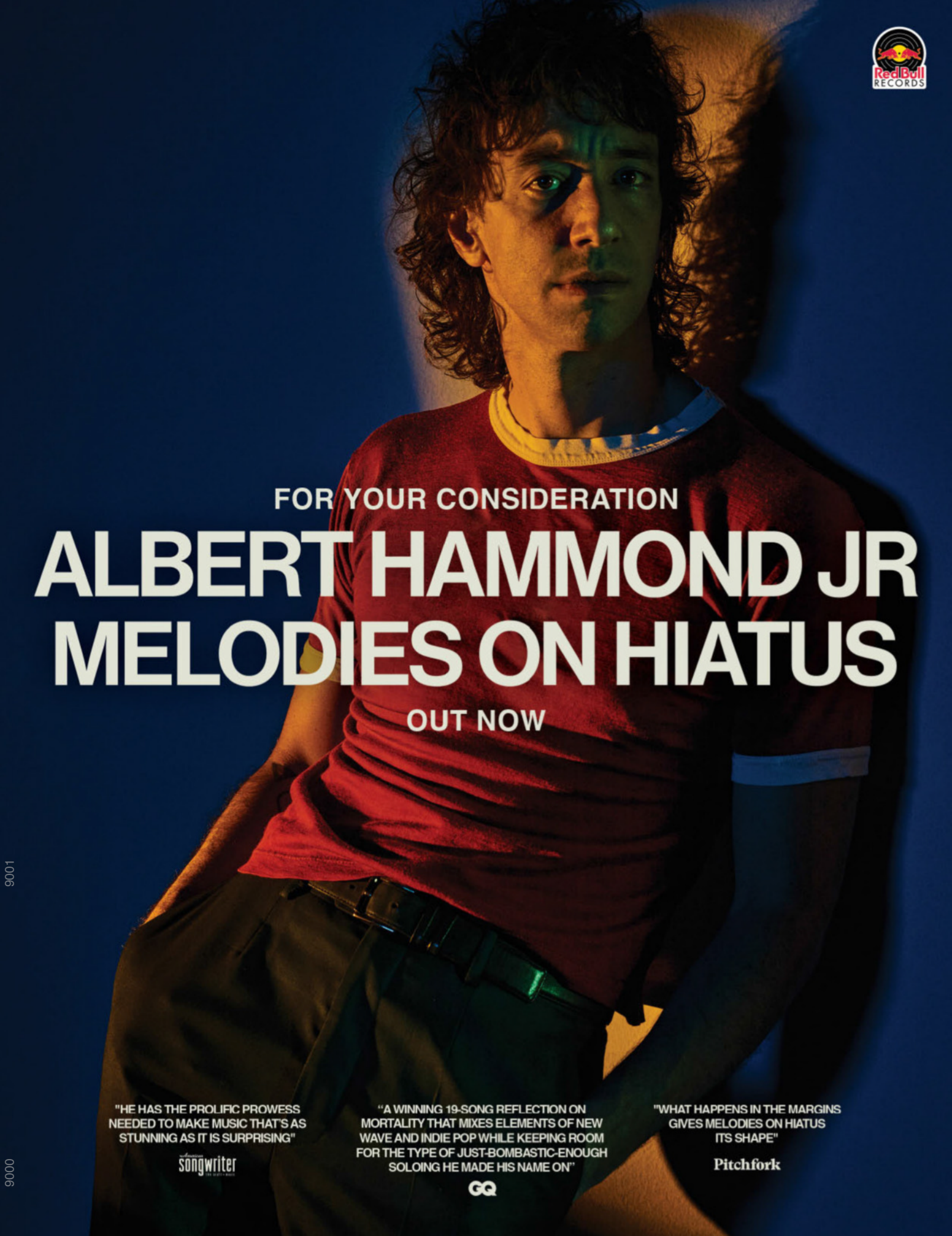
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